MUHAMMAD

THE IDEAL PROPHET

(English Translation of Khutabat-I-Madras)

By

SAIYID SULAIMAN NADWI

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بَلَغَ الْعُلیٰ بِکَمَالِہٖ
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FOREWORD

In the name of Allah, the Most Benevolent and the Most Merciful

A work by a scholar of Maulānā Saiyid Sulaimān Nadwī's eminence needs no introduction. Besides his numerous works of lasting value, the late Maulānā's *Sīrat-un-Nabī*, the great Urdu biography of the Prophet, would have alone been sufficient for the recognition of his literary acumen and wide knowledge. The encyclopaedic sweep of the *Sīrat-un-Nabī* places it in the category of works undertaken by literary academies rather than by a single scholar. In fact, the late Maulānā's scholarship of rare distinction coupled with his piety and earnestness for the cause of God had placed him in the line of great worthies of Islam.

The contents of this volume were delivered by the late Maulānā as extension lectures at Madras, in October-November, 1925, under the auspices of the Muslim Educational Society of Southern India, founded by the late Seth M. Jamāl Muhammad. Later on, Dr. Sir Mohammad Iqbal's 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam' came into existence in the shape of discourses delivered from that forum. Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthal and Maulānā ʿAbdul Mājid Daryābādī, the two savants of the Qur'ān, were some of the other scholars who also delivered lectures at Madras on different subjects on the invitation of the Muslim Educational Society.

Maulānā Saiyid Sulaimān Nadwī regarded these lectures, published later on under the title of *Khutabāt-i-Madrās* (Madras Lectures), as his best work. The portrayal of the Prophet's character by the author is not only vivid and convincing but also graceful and intensely living : he is inspired and inspires others. He has produced a sketch which must be the delight even of those who have an access to the vast stores of information on the subject. These lectures present, without any doubt, a quintessence of the *Sīrat-un-Nabī*. It might, however, be mentioned here, as the author had made it a point to explain in his preface of the third edition of this book, that according to the belief of the Muslims all the apostles of God were impeccable, sinless and perfect guides of humanity ; yet, the comparisons attempted between them and the last Prophet, Muhammad, (on whom be peace and blessings of Allah), are meant to highlight the distinctive features of the abiding ideal for life of mankind. These comparisons have been made in the light of extant scriptures of the earlier prophets and founders of religions and the writings of their own followers. There is, nevertheless, nothing disparaging in them to the founder of any religion for God Himself says : "Of these messengers, some of whom We have caused to excel others."

A few English translations of the *Khutabāt-i-Madrās* have already appeared earlier, but, I believe, no excuse is needed for this fresh attempt. A classic of universal importance, as these lectures undoubtedly are, needs always to be presented anew in different languages for the benefit of those who are not conversant with the language in which it is originally written. I do not claim to have attempted a literal translation but my rendering would be found to follow the text as faithfully as possible without sacrificing the mood and tenor of the lectures. I would deem myself successful if I am able to convey the contents of these lectures alongwith their vigour and warmth.

I have added a few references as well as footnotes

besides the glossary, index, etc. which, I hope, would increase the utility of the book.

Lastly, I have, to return my best thanks to my friend, Mr. Abrar Ahmad Khan, for carefully going through my manuscript, and for making several valuable suggestions.

MOHIUDDIN AHMAD

Lucknow:
March 15, 1977.

ONE

PROPHETS

The Perfect Models for Humanity

This is a magical world brimming with wonders, diverse and remarkable. One finds here myriads of beings and creatures with distinct characteristics. If one were to cast a glance over different objects, one would find that sensibility and consciousness go on increasing gradually from inorganic matter to human beings. The smallest particle of the universal kingdom known as ether or atom is deprived of all sense perception and consciousness but a faint trace of life appears in the minerals. In the vegetable kingdom sensitiveness of an involuntary nature is discernible in the form of germination and growth while a still higher type of sensibility accompanied by a limited consciousness can be seen in the animal life. Then, in man, the sense perception reaches its perfection with the appearance of volition and consciousness. The inorganic matter is, accordingly, free from every kind of responsibility ; vegetables respond to the law of life and death ; animals are liable to a bit higher responsiveness ; while man has to shoulder the responsibility of everything done by him. In the case of man, too, this responsibility varies according to his sensibility, consciousness and will : the dolts and the

lunatics, the children and the adults and the learned and the sapient are accountable for their actions in proportion to the lack or abundance of these powers.

Now, let us examine this question from another angle. Nature takes upon herself the responsibility to sustain beings and creatures to the extent they lack sensibility, consciousness and volition ; she goes on shifting her responsibility to each in proportion to these potentialities developed by it. Who rears the diamonds and rubies in the bosom of mountains and who feeds the fish in the oceans ? The wild animals are brought up by whom ? Who provides nourishment to the fowls in the air and who attends to their ailments and illness ? Why do the animals of the same species living in mountains and jungles, under different climatic conditions, develop different characteristics ? Why are the dogs of Europe different in appearance from those in Africa ? Why does nature provide them with different types of paws and furs and skins according to different Physical and climatic conditions ?

These differences indicate the ways in which nature helps every being in such wise as it lacks will and consciousness and withdraws its care to the extent each develops the potentialities helpful to maintain itself. Man has to earn his own living. He has to cultivate and grow foodstuff for meeting his needs. He has also not been provided with the coat of short and fine soft hair as some of the animals do have for protecting themselves against the rigours of climate. Likewise, he has himself to cure his illness and heal his wounds.

On the other hand, nature undertakes the responsibility of protecting other creations, to the extent they lack will and perception, against their enemies. She arms them with different coats of mail : to some are given claws and canine teeth, horn to others ; some are taught to fly, or to swim, or to run ; while others fend off their enemies by biting or stinging. But, look at the man. The poor fellow has

neither the tusks of the elephant, nor the claws of the lion, nor even the horns or pointed teeth or stings and poison glands. He has been created weak and defenceless but the great weapons of sense perception, consciousness and volition at his command more than make up for his deficiencies and enable him to subdue powerful elephants and ferocious lions. He can catch poisonous snakes, birds flying in the air and fishes living in high waters. He can contrive a variety of arms and armaments for his defence.

To whichever philosophy or religion you may subscribe, you would nonetheless agree that man is held responsible for his actions by virtue of possessing the senses and consciousness and intellect as well as will and determination. The responsibility devolving on man is known, in the phraseology of Islam, as *takleef-i-Sharʿee* or religious obligation, which is laid on every man according to his competence depending on his strength and puissance. The guiding principle as laid down by God in this regard is—

"Allah tasketh not a soul beyond its scope."[1]

This is the bounden duty lying on man which has been alluded to in the Qurʾān as *amānat* or divine trust—a trust which was first offered to the minerals within the earth and the lofty mountains and the heavens higher up in the skies, but none had the courage to shoulder this onerous responsibility.

> "Lo ! We offered the trust unto the heavens and the earth and the hills, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. And man assumed it. Lo ! he hath proved a tyrant and a fool."[2]

The burdensome trust undertaken by man has been pithily expressed by a poet[3] who says :

1. Q. II : 286
2. Q. XXXIII : 72
3. Hāfiz of Shirāz

"The heavens shrank to bear the burden of Trust,
To my lot it fell as the dice was cast."

For tyranny signifies, in its ultimate analysis, a behaviour exceeding one's limits, the tyrants are more often foolish enthusiasts. Likewise, ignorance is nothing but intemperateness of intellect. The antithesis of tyranny is justice and moderation and that of ignorance, knowledge and understanding. And, since man is by nature inclined towards extravagance and immoderation, he requires knowledge and constraint to enlighten his path. This is why the Qur'ān speaks of these two, knowledge and moderation, as faith and righteousness.

"By the declining day,
Lo! Man is in a state of loss,
Save those who believe and do good works,
And exhort one another to truth and exhort one another to endurance."[1]

The "loss" spoken of in this verse is intemperance or ignorance, which is counterbalanced by faith and good deeds. God cites "the declining day" or the time as a witness to man's loss because the past of mankind bears a testimony to his excesses and overdoings. For the great majority of people have always been a pawn in the game of a few enthusiasts and over-ambitious persons, Thomas Carlyle has aptly remarked that "the history of the world is but the biography of great men." History of the world tends to show that the peoples and nations have ever been exploited and taxed by their compatriots save when they have not been deprived of faith and righteousness. This has invariably been the cause of decay and extinction of every nation.

Read the scripture of any religion or the homilies teaching moral lessons and you would see that the same

1. Q. CIII: 1-3

drama of conflict between knowledge and ignorance, between tyranny and justice has been enacted in different ways. You would find faith and righteousness arrayed against the forces of darkness and ignorance, tyranny and disbelief : it is always the story of those upholding higher human virtues locked in battle against the wicked and the iniquitous. What are, after all, the great epics like the *Iliad* of the Greeks, the *Parallel Lives* of the Romans, the *Shāhnāma* of the Iranians and the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata* of the Hindus ? Every nation has had similar events in its life or that of the founder of an era who had enkindled and kept alive the heroism and the urge of the people to fight the evil. These epics speak of these great events so as to teach every nation that it should give up the ways of wickedness and take to the path of virtue and goodness.

What do the major portion of the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospels and the Qur'ān consist of ? They tell us the stories of ruination of the wicked and disbelieving people spreading corruption on the earth, and of the rise of virtuous and pious in their place, so that we may take a lesson from them and become virtuous, just and God-fearing. This is why all the prophets and saints of yore were sent by God—they taught the ways of virtuous living to the nations of old—and then came the last of them, as a mercy for the whole mankind, so that his life may serve as a beacon of light and guidance for mankind to the end of time. This is what the Qur'ān declares in these words through the Prophet of Islam.

> "I dwelt among you a whole lifetime before it (came to me). Have you then no sense."[1]

The revelation from God sets forth, in this verse, the life of the holy Prophet as an intrinsic evidence of his prophethood.

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1. Q. X : 17

History has, however, preserved the life-stories of men, thousands in number, who had achieved eminence in one field or the other. All of them have left their imprints on the pages of history. There are amongst them emperors surrounded by the splendour of royal courts, an arrary of military commanders and generals, philosophers lost in their thoughts, mighty conquerors intoxicated with power, poets singing to cheer their own solitude with sweet songs and the affluent rolling in riches. All of them have an attraction of their own for the sons of Adam. Whether it be Hannibal of Carthage, or Alexander of Macedonia, or Caesar of Rome, or Darius of Iran, or yet Napoleon of France, the life of each has a fascination for the posterity. Similarly alluring are the lives of all philosophers from Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Diogenes of the ancients to Spencer of England. Even the lives of Nimrod and Pharaoh, Abū Jahl and Abū Lahab and Ḳorah depict yet another trait of human nature and character ; but the question is, who, amongst these, can be deemed as a model of goodness and virtue fit to be followed by other human beings ?

Great generals and conquerors, indeed, were they, who swept everything before them by their sword, but did they also succeed in leaving an ennobling example of their lives to be followed by others ? They had won brilliant victories, but were they able to cut the shackles of superstition and credulous beliefs ? Did they solve any social problem besetting equality and brotherhood of human beings ? Did they succeed in restoring our moral and spiritual health and happiness or in eradicating the faults and failings of our desires ? Did they present any model of moral rectitude and decorous behaviour for the posterity ?

World has given birth to great poets. But, these were painters of fantasy, merely starry-eyed utopians unfit to be assigned any place in the *Republic* of Plato. They have solved no problem of man, since Homer to this day, save feeding the fire of human emotions and helping man's

imagination to run riot with their visions and dreams. No practical model of righteous action could they ever produce with their musical thoughts and rhythmical creations. How correctly the Qur'ān brings in its verdict on the poets.

> "As for the poets, the erring follow them.
> Hast thou not seen how they stray in every valley,
> And how they say that which they do not?
> Save those who believe and do good work."[1]

The Qur'ān also tells us why the exquisite expressions of the verse-makers have been of little use to humanity. They run after every idea aimlessly without any set purpose; more often sinking to the depth of human folly rather than soaring in the height of divine light. The poetry emanating from minds steeped in faith can, sometimes, be effective and enlightening and a restorer of truth and justice. History of the world, however, bears ample proof of the unprofitableness of the poets.

There have been sages and philosophers who have plumbed the secrets of nature beyond the ken of perception and changed the concept of things and materials. They have, nevertheless, failed to produce any blueprint for the practical guidance of humanity. For their flight of imagination lacked practical wisdom, they could never provide man with any guidance in the discharge of his obligations. Aristotle was the precursor of ethical philosophy now studied in every university. His brilliant exposition of ethical impulsions is esteemed highly both by the learned and the learners, but how many of them have been able to betake the path of virtue by reading his dissertations? Teachers well-versed in ethical philosophy can be found almost in every institution of higher learning, who know all about its premises and principles, but has their impact been ever felt beyond their class-rooms? On the contrary, we find that very often heir conduct and behaviour are no better than

1. Q. XXVI : 224-227

those of the man on the street. To walk in the right path one has not to hear the sermons but to see the living examples of cardinal virtues.

Powerful kings and emperors have also appeared on the stage of this world. They have extended their dominions, played with the life and property of their fellow beings, extracted wealth through taxes and tithes from some and bestowed their bounties on others. They have demeaned one to exalt the other. The Book of God presents, in the words of the Queen of Sheba, this rare picture of their doings on the earth.

> "Lo ! kings, when they enter a township, ruin it and make the honour of its people shame."[1]

The swords of mighty kings have hanged over the heads of criminals in thoroughfares and market places, but they have failed to reach the guilt concealed in the minds and hearts of men. They have enforced law and order in the habitations and townships, but the kingdom of spirit has ever been beyond their reach, or, rather, their own courts and castles have been the breeding dens of moral confusion and spiritual anarchy. What else have the kings like Alexanders and Caesars left for us ?

How many lawgivers has the world seen from Solon to this day ? Their laws were not only short-lived but have also failed to cleanse the hearts and purify the morals. Subsequent rulers always placed a new set of laws on the statute book, albeit more often to further their own interests than to enforce the rules of equity. The world has not changed even today. Still, the legislatures in every country make and unmake laws endlessly, but seldom their labours are for the benefit of the people whom they profess to represent. It is more the interest of the powers that be which they seek to promote.

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1. Q.XXVII : 34

These are, broadly, the higher sections of society which could be expected to work for the welfare of humanity. If you give further thought to the matter you would see that whatever light of goodness and virtue you find in the world today, it owes its existence to the pure-hearted souls whom you know by the name of prophets and messengers of God. Wherever you come across compassion and justice and a sincere desire to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and the downtrodden, no matter whether these are found in the cave of a mountain or a dense forest or a populous city, they are due to the call given by one of these men of God.

The Qur'ān tells us :

"There is not a nation but a warner hath passed among them."[1]

"For every folk a guide."[2]

The lustre of their teachings is to be found today in every country and nation: the savages of Africa and the civilised nations of Europe are both equally indebted to them for edification of their souls. Of all the groups of men we have mentioned afore, the most august are they, for they rule not over the bodies of men like the kings, but their authority is enshrined in the hearts of the people. Their kingdom is not of lands and countries, but of hearts and spirits: they do not wield the sword, yet they obliterate the stains of guilt and peccancy at one stroke; they are not dreamy-eyed songsmiths, yet the sweetness of their speech delights the soul ; they are neither senators nor law-makers, yet the laws given by them regulate the conduct of statesmen and judges, kings and subjects from age to age.

This is not a question of faith or conviction but a matter of fact and history. One has to see whether it has actually been so or not. The edicts of Patliputra's Ashoka are engraved on the pillars of stones, but those of the Buddha

1. Q. XXXV : 24
2. Q. XIII : 7

are inscribed in the hearts of people. The decrees of the rulers of Ujjain, Hastinapur, Delhi and Kannauj are no more to be found today, but the *Dharma Shāstra* of Manū still prevails. The statutes of Hamurâbbi, the King of Babel, have long been buried under the dust, but Abraham's teachings are still alive! Pharaoh's imprudent demand to pay divine honours to him was as transient as the clouds, but Moses still lives in his teachings. How long did the laws of Solon remain in force, but the laws of Torah are still the measure of justice! The Roman Law which nailed Jesus Christ to the Cross became extinct long ago, but the doctrines of love that flowed from the lips of Jesus still redeem the wrongdoers and wash them of their sins. The Abū Jahls of Mecca, the Chosroes of Iran and the Caesars of Rome are all dead and gone, but the Lord of Madina still rules over the hearts of people in every part of the world.

If these facts are correct, one would have to concede, not on grounds of faith, but through reason and logic of stubborn facts, that no other class of people except the prophets has worked for the welfare and happiness of mankind in its truest sense; theirs was the endeavour consisting of virtue and goodness, purity of heart, moderation and temperance. They all came to this world as messengers of God to preach the gospel of Truth and Faith, and they left their footsteps of righteousness to be followed by the coming generations. It is from their teachings alone that the rulers and the ruled, the rich and the poor and the learned and the illiterate can derive equal benefit.

> "That is Our argument. We gave it unto Abraham against the folk. We raise unto degrees of wisdom whom We will. Lo! thy Lord is Wise, Aware.
>
> "And We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob; each of them We guided; and Noah did We guide aforetime; and of his seed (We guided) David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron.

Thus do we reward the good.

"And Zachariah and John and Jesus and Elias. Each one (of them) was of the righteous.

"And Ishmael and Elisa and Jonah and Lot. Each one (of them) did We prefer above (Our) creatures,

"With some of their forefathers and their off-spring and their brethren; and We chose them and guided them unto a straight path.

"Such is the guidance of Allah wherewith He guideth whom He will of His bondmen. But if they had set up (for worship) aught beside Him, (all) that they did would have been vain.

"Those are they unto whom We gave the Scripture and command and prophethood. But if these disbelieve therein, then indeed We shall entrust it to a people who will not be disbelievers therein.

"Those are they whom Allah guideth, so follow their guidance."[1]

These luminous verses of the Qur'ān speak of a particular group among men, some of whom have been mentioned by name, who had been sent to cure the spiritual ailments of mankind and restore its moral health. They were men, holy and angelic in spirit, who preached the word of God in different times and climes and in every land. Whatever of moral rectitude and righteousness, purity and chastity man possesses today, it is all their legacy, and in following their footsteps alone lies the salvation and well-being of humanity.

The prophets adorn and illuminate the soul of man: the zealous preachings of Noah, the unshakable principle of God's oneness upheld by Abraham, the patrimony of resignation to Divine will bequeathed by Isaac, the self-sacrifice of Ishmael, the indefatigable efforts of Moses, the faithfulness of Aaron, the self-resignation of Jacob, the

1. Q. VI : 84-91

lamentations of David, the wisdom of Solomon, the litanies of Zachariah, the chastity of John, the piety of Jesus, the penitence of Jonah, the strenuous exertion of Lot and the endurance of Job have made the life of man winsome and bright. To these consecrated souls can be traced every virtue and goodness found in the world today.

There is, however, no denying the fact that culture and civilisation, progress and improvement, in short, everything that has contributed towards welfare and material progress of mankind and helped man to raise himself to the level of vicegerant of God on earth, has been brought about by the combined effort of all men. Astronomers have discovered the movements of heavenly bodies, chemists have found out the properties of substances, physicians have searched the medicines for curing diseases, architects have developed the science and designs of structures and artisans have given birth to useful crafts and fine arts, and all of them have thus a share in the making of our world. We ought to be thankful to all of them. Nevertheless, we are even more obliged to offer our thanks to those who have decorated the world within us. They are the physicians who have cured us of our greed and envy, diagnosed the ailments of our souls and refurbished its lost energy and vigour. They elaborated our behaviour patterns and aptitudes, ideas and intentions and showed us the way of attaining purity of heart and sublimity of spirit. It was through the efforts of these God-moved souls that the cultural attainments were refined and embellished, the link between man and God, the slave and the Lord, was established. How could the world have attained its excellence if we had been denied the knowledge received through prophetic teachings? We are, verily, indebted more to these men of God than to any other class or group of persons. This is the compliment due to the prophets of God and it ought to be paid by all of us whenever their name comes on the lips of anyone. And, this is the benediction taught by Islam to be offered for them—'O

God! Have mercy and peace on all of them.'

For nothing in this fleeting world is eternal, these impeccable guides of humanity had also to make their exit from this fleeting world and go to their everlasting home after they had completed the task for which they had been sent by God. The subsequent generations have thus to preserve the records of their lives, sayings and doings. In fact, the documented portraits of the masters of old and the records of their achievements going by the name of history and biography are the only means for conserving the arts and sciences, discoveries and ideas of the earlier generations. We have undoubtedly some lesson in every past experience and, for that reason, the purification of our spirits and morals depends on following in the footsteps of these exalted teachers of morality and their pure-hearted followers. People have hitherto drawn inspiration from their sublime examples and shall continue to do so in future also. We are, therefore, duty-bound, more than anything else, to preserve the accounts and endeavours of the prophets for our own guidance and betterment.

But, no philosophy, no education and no teaching, howsoever elevated and exalted, can inspire the people unless its preacher or teacher has a loving personality capable of commanding the affection and reverence of his followers. Recently, when I was returning home in February, 1924, after a brief visit to Hijāz and Egypt, I happened to enjoy the company of the celebrated poet, Dr. Rabindranāth Tagore, who was coming back from America by the same ship. A fellow passenger asked Tagore: "How is it that Brahmo Samāj has not succeeded in its mission although its creed was exceedingly fair, it enjoined reverence to all religions and their founders; and its fundamental principles, being exceedingly logical and satisfying were formulated in the light of modern science and philosophy?" The poet-philosopher reached the core of the matter when he replied:

"It could not fare well because it had no personality behind it to set up a practical example and attract and inspire the people." Truly, no religion can succeed without the shining example of a gifted teacher.

We, thus, need men of God, pure-hearted and impeccable, who are specimen of human perfection, for our guidance and salvation. May Allah bless them all.

MUHAMMAD
The Ideal Prophet

Man needs the light of his past experiences to brighten his present and future. And, as I told you earlier, all the different segments of humanity which have done anything to make this world a better place to live in deserve our gratitude; but, the most deserving of our regard are those whom we call the prophets of God. Each one of them has, in his own time, presented a winsom example of his sublime conduct and moral behaviour. If one was a model of endurance, others were emblems of selflessness, sacrifice, fervour for Truth and Oneness of God, submission to the Will of the Lord, chastity and piety, in short, each of them was a lighthouse of guidance showing the path of exalted behaviour in one or the other walk of life everyman has to tread in his sojourn on the earth. Man, however, stood in the need of another guide who could illuminate the entire gamut of human behaviour, in all its manifoldness, by his comprehensive example of goodness and virtue. Man, in other words, needed a perfect and universal exemplar who could place in his hands a guide-book of practical life, so that every wayfarer may reach his destination safely. And, this exemplar did come to the world in the person of the

last of the prophets, Muhammad, on whom be peace and blessings of the Lord.

The Qur'ān announced this gospel truth in these words :

> "O Prophet! Lo! We have sent thee as a witness and a bringer of good tidings and a warner. And as a summoner unto Allāh by His permission, and, as a lamp that giveth light."[1]

He is the prophet well-informed, the witness to God's commandments, the bringer of glad tidings, the warner unto those who are heedless, the summoner of the erring to the way of God, the resplendent light which dispels the darkness and shows the right path.

Every prophet of God came to this world as a witness, or a harbinger of good tidings, or as a warner, or as a summoner, but never in the past there came a prophet who combined all these qualities. There were witnesses to God's majesty and overlordship like Jacob, Isaac and Ishmael. Others like Abraham and Jesus were the heralds of glad tidings. There were also warners like Noah, Moses, Hūd and Shuʿyeb, the key-note of whose forebodings was terrible punishment awaiting the evildoers. Then, there were the prophets like Joseph and Jonah whose teachings set the tone for summoners to divine guidance. But the messenger *par excellence* who had all these marks of prophethood—a witness as well as a welcomer, a warner as well as a caller—and who was a distinguished Apostle in every respect was none else save Muhammad. He was sent to the world as the last Prophet, the final one, after whom no other messenger was to be sent again by God. This is the reason why he was granted a *sharīʿah* or the law that was perfect and final requiring no revision in the days to come.

For the teachings of the last Prophet were to be everabiding, to remain unchanged to the end of time, he was

1. Q. XXXIII : 45-46

sent as an acme of perfection with ever-blooming guidance and resplendent light. This is an indisputable fact attested by the pages of history.

A character held out as an ideal or model for humanity needs must fulfil certain conditions before such a claim can be universally accepted. The first and foremost test to which the character of such a guide should be put is historicity.

Historicity means that the genuineness of the accounts of life and character of any man put forth as a perfect exemplar should proceed not from any fable or a legendary tale, but from reputed sources and methodical records of what we call as history. Man is never disposed, by his frame of mind, to be deeply impressed by any happening, event or biography which he knows to be fictitious. For a lasting impression of any character, one needs the assurance that every detail of the life, saying and doing of such a personality is perfectly genuine and verifiable. Historical stories have, for that very reason, a greater appeal than the works of fiction. Another reason for the historicity of a character, particularly if it is intended to impart a lesson to others, is that no bed-time fable, told to while away the hours of leisure, can be deemed to hold up a model for emulation or following its example. For nobody can be expected to follow a mythical or imaginary character, it is absolutely essential that the journal of a life presented as an emblem of virtuous human conduct should be perfectly authentic in accordance with the criterion set for acceptance of any event as historical.

We hold all the prophets of God in reverence and pay homage to them. We also agree that every one of them was a truthful messenger of divine guidance but the Lord has Himself told us that—

"Of these messengers, some of whom We have

last of the prophets, Muhammad, on whom be peace and blessings of the Lord.

The Qur'ān announced this gospel truth in these words :

> "O Prophet! Lo! We have sent thee as a witness and a bringer of good tidings and a warner. And as a summoner unto Allah by His permission, and, as a lamp that giveth light."[1]

He is the prophet well-informed, the witness to God's commandments, the bringer of glad tidings, the warner unto those who are heedless, the summoner of the erring to the way of God, the resplendent light which dispels the darkness and shows the right path.

Every prophet of God came to this world as a witness, or a harbinger of good tidings, or as a warner, or as a summoner, but never in the past there came a prophet who combined all these qualities. There were witnesses to God's majesty and overlordship like Jacob, Isaac and Ishmael. Others like Abraham and Jesus were the heralds of glad tidings. There were also warners like Noah, Moses, Hūd and Shuʿyeb, the key-note of whose forebodings was terrible punishment awaiting the evildoers. Then, there were the prophets like Joseph and Jonah whose teachings set the tone for summoners to divine guidance. But the messenger *par excellence* who had all these marks of prophethood—a witness as well as a welcomer, a warner as well as a caller—and who was a distinguished Apostle in every respect was none else save Muhammad. He was sent to the world as the last Prophet, the final one, after whom no other messenger was to be sent again by God. This is the reason why he was granted a *sharīʿah* or the law that was perfect and final requiring no revision in the days to come.

For the teachings of the last Prophet were to be ever-abiding, to remain unchanged to the end of time, he was

1. Q. XXXIII : 45-46

sent as an acme of perfection with ever-blooming guidance and resplendent light. This is an indisputable fact attested by the pages of history.

A character held out as an ideal or model for humanity needs must fulfil certain conditions before such a claim can be universally accepted. The first and foremost test to which the character of such a guide should be put is historicity.

Historicity means that the genuineness of the accounts of life and character of any man put forth as a perfect exemplar should proceed not from any fable or a legendary tale, but from reputed sources and methodical records of what we call as history. Man is never disposed, by his frame of mind, to be deeply impressed by any happening, event or biography which he knows to be fictitious. For a lasting impression of any character, one needs the assurance that every detail of the life, saying and doing of such a personality is perfectly genuine and verifiable. Historical stories have, for that very reason, a greater appeal than the works of fiction. Another reason for the historicity of a character, particularly if it is intended to impart a lesson to others, is that no bed-time fable, told to while away the hours of leisure, can be deemed to hold up a model for emulation or following its example. For nobody can be expected to follow a mythical or imaginary character, it is absolutely essential that the journal of a life presented as an emblem of virtuous human conduct should be perfectly authentic in accordance with the criterion set for acceptance of any event as historical.

We hold all the prophets of God in reverence and pay homage to them. We also agree that every one of them was a truthful messenger of divine guidance but the Lord has Himself told us that—

"Of these messengers, some of whom We have

caused to excel others."[1]

We believe that this was the honour granted to Muhammad since he was the last of the line of prophets, bearer of the final and ever-abiding message of God and, thus, he was sent as a standard of virtue and goodness for the guidance of mankind to the end of time. No other prophet than he was intended to be the seal of the divine messengers ; nor were the teachings of any other prophet to last till the Doomsday. They were all sent as models teachers and guides, no doubt ; but for a particular age and people, and, hence, whatever they had taught gradually vanished from the memory of humanity.

Now, let us think it over again. How many apostles were sent by God to this world, to all the nations and countries ? Their numbers must run into hundreds of thousands. Be that as it may, Islamic traditions put the figure at one hundred and twenty-four thousand although the Qur'ān tells us the names of a few only. But, even of those whose names we know, how little of their life and character is known to the world ? Although there are no means to verify it, the Hindus claim that their's was the oldest civilisation of the world. Their sacred writings mention innumerable sages, but is there one to be put forth as a historical personality ? There are many amongst these saints and sages about whom nothing except their names are known to us ; there are others who can be treated as mythological personalities rather than characters belonging to the realm of history. More datailed knowledge of the noble personages described in the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana* are undoubtedly available, but can their lives be tested on the touchstone of history ? Nobody knows the age, or the era, or the century, or the year, or period when they lived. Certain European orientalists have, of late, hazarded their opinion when these sages would have been living, but this

1. Q. II : 253

is the only evidence available about their historicity. A majority of these experts do not even regard them as historical and deny that the mythological personalities described in these books were ever born on this earth.

Zoroaster, the founder of ancient Iranian faith named after him, is still revered by a large number of people, but his historical personality is also hidden behind the mist of obscurity. Several sceptical orientalists of Europe and America have doubts if a man with this name ever lived in this world. Even the scholars who accept Zoroaster's historical existence, have succeeded in giving, through guess-work, some paltry details about his life. These accounts are so contradictory that no reasonable standard of practical human life can be based on them. Where was Zoroaster born, what was the year, what was his nationality or family, what was the religion he preached, whether the scripture attributed to him is genuine, what was the language spoken by him, when and where he died—each of these questions has elicited a hundred contradictory answers since no authentic and dependable records about him are available to clear the mist of doubt and uncertainty shrouding Zoroaster's personality. The Zoroastrians, or the Parsees, as they are known nowadays, lack acknowledged traditions about their Master and have to depend on the researches of European scholars for answering these questions. Their national sources do not go beyond Firdausi's *Shāhnāmā*. It is hardly an excuse that the Greek invaders of Iran had destroyed their scriptures ; the point is that they exist no more. The very fact of their destruction settles the issue that the teachings of Zoroaster, whatever they had been, were not meant to be ever-abiding. This, by the way, is the reason why orientalists like Kern and Darmeteter refuse to accept Zoroaster as a historical figure.

Another religion of ancient Asia was Buddhism which was once the dominant faith of the people of India, China, the whole of Central Asia, Afghanistan and Turkistan and

is still a living faith in Burma, Indo-China, China, Japan and Tibet. It was exterminated in India by Brahmanism and replaced by Islam in the Central Asia, but the power it commanded in South-Asia still sustains its faith and culture. Nevertheless, has its continued existence in several countries succeeded in preserving the dependable annals of Buddha's life and work ? The age when the Buddha lived is calculated with reference to the time of Rājās of Magadh, which, in turn, is fixed by the chance discovery of diplomatic relations that these rulers had established with the Greeks. We have even more scant details about the life of Confucius, the founder of China's Confucianism, although the number of its adherents is still reported to be more than ten millions.

Semites have had hundreds of prophets ; nevertheless, history knows hardly anything about most of them except their names. Only a few incidents about the lives of Noah, Abraham, Sālih, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Zachariah and John are known to posterity. All the important links transmitting the details of their lives and doings are missing from the chain of history. How, then, the incomplete, disjointed accounts of the lives of these patriarchs can serve as beacons of guidance to humanity today ? Barring the description of their morals and conduct given in the Qur'ān, all that is told about them in the Jewish Scriptures is held to be spurious by competent scholars. Even if we were to ignore these criticisms, only a dim and incomplete picture of these men of God emerges from the Jewish writings.

Torah[1] is the chief source of information about Moses, but if the experts and authors of Encyclopaedia Britannica are to be believed, the Scripture extant today was written hundreds of years after the death of Moses. Some German scholars even claim to have discovered a two-fold tradition on which the Torah is based for it carries the inconsistencies

1. Torah is the Hebrew word for "the Pentateuch".

of its original sources. The learned discourse on this issue can be seen in the article included under the heading "Bible" in the latest edition of the Encyclopaedia.[1] If these criticisms of the scholars are deemed to be correct, as they are generally accepted, what historical validity can be claimed for the records of other events prior to Moses ?

Gospels are the records of the life of Jesus Christ. The Christian world, however, accepts only four of them and rejects others, like the Gospels of Thomas and Barnabas, as apocryphal. However, not one of the writers of these four 'authentic' Gospels ever saw Jesus. Nothing is known about the sources on which these Gospels are based. Doubts have been raised whether the Gospels bearing the names of their authors were actually written by them. Even the time and language of the original Gospels are uncertain. Biblical scholars hold the view that the four extant Gospels were compiled from various sources from about 60 A. D. onwards. In regard to these dubious elements as well as the stories of birth and death of Jesus and the doctrine of Trinity, certain critics have expressed the view—as discussed recently by a famous Chicago Journal in its several issues—that the story of Christ is purely fictitious, adopted from Greek and Roman myths containing similar stories of birth, death and resurrection of some pagan gods. The researches into the origin of the Gospels show how puzzling and insufficient is the evidence to rediscover the Jesus of history.

That any human being should be set up as a perennial guide for man, it is most essential to have the entire life of that model before us. No incident, no part of the life of such a shining example should remain in the dark. Like an open book it should be known inside out so that humanity may be able to make out how far that life can serve as an

1. 11th Edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

ideal guide and teacher.

Viewed from this angle, none of the preachers and founders of the religions would stand the test of historicity except the Prophet of Islam. The uniqueness of Muhammad in this regard furnishes yet another testimony to the fact that he alone was sent down to this world as the seal of prophets. Only three or four of the founders of religions, as earlier stated by us, can at best be put forth as historical characters, but not all of them can claim that everything about their life and character is known to the world. Buddhists form today about one-fourth of the world's population, but all that we know of the life of the Buddha consists of a mixture of fables and folk-lores. If we were to make a search for the missing links of his life, we would decidedly be unsuccessful in our quest. All that we can glean from the stories known about him is that a certain chieftain in the foothills of the Himalayas, south of Nepal, had a son who was endowed with a thoughtful disposition. After he had grown to manhood and become father of a child, he happened to see certain persons afflicted with misery. He was so shocked by the sufferings and decay manifest in all earthly things around him that he left his hearth and home to discover a higher and more enduring meaning in life and human destiny. He wandered all over the land—Varānasī, Pātlīputra and Rājgīr—sometimes he roamed in the cities, at others rambled over the mountains and forests, and ultimately reached Gayā, where, sitting under a Bodhi-tree, he made the claim of having attained enlightenment. Thereafter, he went about expounding his discovery from Varānasī to Bihār and then left this fleeting world. This is, in fine, the sum total of our knowledge about the Buddha.

Zoroaster was also the founder of a faith. But nothing save surmises and conjectures about his life is the knowledge possessed by the world today. Rather than recounting the fictions about him we would better direct our attention to the resume of findings by an expert given in the

Encyclopaedia Britannica in an article bearing his name.

> "The person of the Zoroaster whom we meet with in these hymns (of Gāthās) differs *to-to Coelo* from the Zoroaster of the younger Avesta. He is the exact opposite of the miraculous personage of a later legend."[1]

After giving a description of the Gāthā, the writer continues :

> "Yet we must not expect too much from the Gāthās in the way of definite details. They give no historical account of the life and teaching of their prophet, but rather are, so to say, *versus memoriales*, which recapitulate the main points of interest, often again in brief outlines."[2]

Again, as to the birth place of Zoroaster, the writer goes on to say :

> "As to his birth place, the testimonies are conflicting."[3]

No consensus of opinion exists about the time of Zoroaster, which is hotly disputed by Greek historians as well as modern authorities. The writer of the article reaches the conclusion that—

> "Agathies remarks (ii-24), with perfect truth, that it is no longer possible to determine with any certainty when he lived and legislated."[4]

All we know about Zoroaster is that he was born somewhere in Azarbaijan, preached his religion around Balkh, converted King Vistaspa to his faith, worked certain miracles, married and had a few children, and then died somewhere. Can anybody lay a claim that a person about whom our information is so limited and paltry is a well-known personality, fit to be put forth as a guiding star for humanity ?

1. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th Edition), 1910-11, Vol. XXVIII, p. 1042
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*

Moses is the most celebrated among the prophets of old. Let us leave aside the question relating to the authenticity of Torah, as it exists at present, and assume that its five books contain a correct and dependable account of its author. But, what do they tell us ? The life story of this great Prophet told by the Torah can be summed up in a few sentences. Moses is brought up by an Egyptian princess in the palace of Pharaoh. After he comes of age, he helps the oppressed Bani Israel on one or two occasions and then he takes flight to Midian, where he marries and returns to Egypt again after a long period of exile. On his way back, mantle of prophethood falls upon him, he goes to the court of Pharaoh, works certain miracles and demands the emancipation of the enslaved Hebrews. He takes the advantage of a dark night to flee with his people from Egypt ; Pharaoh leads the hordes of warriors and chariots thundering after Bani Israel ; the sea gives way to Moses and his followers ; but the watery walls surge back over the pursuing Egyptians. Moses takes his people to Arabia, and thence to Syria, fights the unbelieving folk living there and ultimately meets his death, on a hill, after he has grown quite old. Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Torah, thus describes the journey's end of Moses in the concluding paragraphs.

> "So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor : but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. And Moses *was* a hundred and twenty years old when he died : his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.[1] And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom LORD knew face to face."[2]

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1. Deut. 34 : 5-7
2. Deut. 34:10

All the five books of Torah, the last of which is Deuteronomy, are believed to have been written by Moses himself. But, the few sentences cited above suggest, on the first glance, that the book of Deuteronomy, or at least its concluding portion, could have never been written by Moses. Nobody knows the name of Moses' biographer.

Similarly the words : 'no man knows his sepulchre unto this day' and 'there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses' clearly indicate that the Book must have been written after a fairly long time when people had lost trace of such an important monument as the grave of their greatest benefactor, or, it could be that the whole nation had forgotten all about Moses in the glimmerings of a new redeemer expected by them.

"Moses *was* a hundred and twenty years old when he died," says the Deuteronomy, but how little do we know of the events of his long life ? Only a few sketchy and disjointed events of Moses' life, like his birth, migration to Midian, marriage and early period of ministry and.exodus have been related by his biographer. He is then seen taking part in a few battles but makes his exit to enter the scene again when he has grown quite old. Let us wean our thoughts from the ups and downs of Moses' life for every man has to undergo a chapter of accidents which are peculiar in each case, but we do need to know about the morals and conduct, demeanour and behaviour of a guide and leader of mankind. These very essential details of the life of Moses form the missing links of his story, however. Old Testament is replete with such trivialities as the ancestral lineage of its characters, population of the Hebrews at different periods and places and their rites and customs. Howsoever important these details may be for the study of the Holy Land's geography and chronology, geneology and sociology, but they are hardly of any practical utility for compilation of the biography of a religious guide like Moses. This deficiency makes the characterisation of Moses

incomplete.

The apostle of God nearest in time to the Prophet of Islam was Jesus Christ whose followers today outnumber the votaries of every other religion. Strange though it may seem, but it is a hard fact that the particulars of the life of this Prophet available today are the most meagre in comparison to the founders of all other religions. The keen interest taken by the Christendom in the study of ancient civilisations, archaeological excavations and deciphering of ancient writings has shed a flood-light on the distant past of Babylon, Assyria, Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Africa, India and Turkistan and succeeded in rewriting not a few lost pages of the ancient history; yet, if it has failed anywhere to recover the missing pieces of the eternal landscape of the past, it is the sealed book of its own saviour's life story. Earnest Renan left no stone unturned to recreate the *Vie de Jesus*[1] but, as everybody knows, his effort proved fruitless. The New Testament tells us that Jesus Christ died at the age of thirty-three but it records the events of the last three years of his life only.[2] Even this is either not supported by sufficient evidence or has been proved to be dubious by

1. Published in 1863
2. In 1906, Albert Schweitzer, a philosopher and theologian, published his monumental work, entitled *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* in which he surveyed the whole enterprise from the earliest time to his day. This is how he began his final chapter: "There is nothing more negative than the result of the critical study of the life of Jesus."

   Another scholar, Rev. Dr. Charles Anderson Scot says in his article on Jesus Christ written for the 14th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

   > "The attempt to write a 'Life of Jesus' should frankly be abandoned. The material for it certainly does not exist. It has been calculated that the total number of days of his life regarding which we have any record does not exceed 50."
   >
   > (Vol. XIII, pp. 16/17)

good evidence to the contrary. The only information we have about the historical Jesus is that he was brought to Egypt after his birth, worked a few miracles during his childhood; but then he quits the scene to reappear at the age of thirty, baptising and preaching the gospel to fishermen in the mountains beside the sea of Galilee. He gathers a handful of followers, has a few discussions about the Law with the priests and elders, is got arrested by the Jews and produced before Pontius Pilate, is ultimately crucified and his sepulchre is found vacant on the third day. Nobody knows where Jesus remained or what he did during the twenty-five years of his life's duration. And, of the happenings narrated about his last three years, what else is there except a few parables, miracles and crucifixion?

A biography to be ideal must also be comprehensive. In other words, whatever light and guidance people need in different walks of life—for fulfilment of their duties, redeeming the pledges, being fair and just and virtuous—should be had from the life of the ideal personage. Viewed from this angle, one would have to concede that only the life of the Prophet of Islam conforms to this standard. What is religion, after all? It is nothing save a means to unfold the relationship, on the one hand, between man and his Master, and, on the other, between man and man. Religion is, thus, meant to teach us the obligations we owe to God and our rights and duties with reference to our fellow beings; and, hence, it becomes a bounden duty of the follower of every religion to find out what light the life of his prophet or founder of religion sheds on these questions. From this standpoint, however, one would not find complete guidance anywhere save in the life of Muhammad, the last Prophet of God.

Religions are of two kinds. One, the religions like Buddhism and Jainism which are agnostic, denying the existence of God. It would, therefore, be futile to look for

the awareness of God's nature and attributes or the tender regard and adoration for God and His Omnipotence and Unicity in the life of the precursors of these religions. The others are theistic faiths which acknowledge the existence of the Supreme Being in one form or the other, but the lives of their founders breathe little of their devotion to God. The portraits of their lives do not pretend to be shadows of divine perfection, nor do they tell us explicitly about their quest for God or their beliefs and convictions. Go through the Old Testament and you would find quite a few references to the Oneness of God, His commandments and the rules for offering oblations unto God, but hardly a sentence describing the feeling of awe and gratitude to God, spiritual exaltation and a living awareness of the Supreme Being experienced by Moses. Had the religion of Moses been the last and abiding principle of divine guidance, its followers must have preserved the aids to spiritual elevation; but they failed to do so, perhaps, as designed by Providence.

Gospels are the mirrors of Christ's life. They tell us that God is the Father of Jesus, but what obligations the son owed to his Father and how he answered this call of duty? The son declares the great love of the Father for him, but how much did the son love his heavenly Father? How he obeyed His commands, how he paid Him divine honours, how he bowed and humbled himself to show his reverence and whether he asked the Father to grant him anything else save the day's bread? We do not know whether Jesus spent his nights in prayers and vigils except the one before his betrayal and arrest. What spiritual enlightenment and inspiration can we draw from a prophet like him? Had the gospelists clearly portrayed the picture of communion between Jesus Christ and God instead of spinning myths around him, the first Christian Emperor would not have had to convene the Nicene Council, after 325 years of the birth of Christ, to draw up a statement of Christian creed which remains an inexplicable riddle to

this day.

Turning to the rights and duties of human beings, we again fail to find any clear exposition of this important matter in the life of any prophet or founder of religion except the life of Muhammad. Gautama Buddha left his home and family, severing all connections from his loving wife and innocent son, to discover the meaning of human destiny in the solitude of the woods. He said good-bye to his friends and abandoned the responsibility of administration in order to find the peace of *Nirvāna* by overcoming the desire arising out of his will-to-live. Now, one can ask what message does the teaching of the Buddha contain for the common man, for the rulers and the ruled, for the rich and the poor, for the master and the servant; and how does it provide guidance in the discharge of one's obligations as a father, as a son, or as a brother, sister or friend? Are the teachings of the Buddha comprehensive enough to be followed by the ascetics and businessmen alike? His teachings were, in point of fact, never acted upon by the working classes, else the administration in the countries like China, Japan, Siam, Tibet and Burma would have long gone to winds; trade, industry and business would have come to a standstill; and the populous cities would have turned into woodlands.

Moses was an illustrious leader of men; noted for commanding the Hebrew hordes in the battlefields. He could thus be a model in the case of a call to arms, but has he left any precedent to be followed in the discharge of one's rights and duties and fulfilment of one's obligations to others? How he wanted the wife and the husband, the father and the son, brothers and friends to behave towards one another; what his custom was in making peace with his adversaries; how he spent his wealth for the benefit of the sick and the poor, the orphan and the way-farers? Moses was married, had children as well as a brother, relatives

and friends and, we believe, as an Apostle of God, his behaviour towards them would have been exemplary. But, we are at a loss to find any guidance in these matters from the books of Scripture attributed to him !

Jesus Christ had his mother and, as the Bible tells us, he had brothers and sisters and even his earthly father, although he was born of a virgin mother. Nevertheless, the story of his life told in the Gospels keeps mum about his behaviour towards his kith and kin. Social relationship has been, and shall ever remain, the pivot of civilised existence, and hence every religion must seek to regulate it. But, what is there in the life of Jesus Christ to offer guidance in these matters ? He belonged to a subject race ruled by an alien power. How could he, then, set any example for the rulers and administrators ? He did not marry, and hence his life has nothing to guide the spouses whose relationship of love and affection has been spoken of in the very first chapter of the Old Testament. Furthermore, since an overwhelming portion of world's population leads a married life, Jesus' life would come amiss to offer any guidance to them. Verily, Jesus can never be the ideal guide of humanity for he ever remained indifferent to his relatives, had nothing to do with earning and spending, war and peace and friends and foes. These very mundane affairs, unfortunately, form the hub of our earthly life. Were this world to follow the example of Jesus, all progress will be suspended and the silence of the grave would descend over the world. Christian Europe would, then, die a natural death.

Yet another determinant of an ideal life is its practicality—a decisive test for a founder of religion or law-giver ; since, the preacher of a canon and system of belief should be able to lead the way by his personal example of living up to his precepts. His actions, in other words, should demonstrate the feasibility of his teachings.

Anybody can enunciate any number of fanciful notions,

attractive concepts and appealing philosophies, but not everyone can live up to them. Innocent and fine maxims are no proof of one's virtuous character: it rather consists of following the narrow, straight path of unblemished rectitude. Were it not so, it would be difficult to distinguish between vice and virtue, good and bad and the world would then abound in agreeable chatterers. Now, let us judge the founders of religions by this acid test.

"But I say unto you which hear," said Jesus Christ, "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the *one* cheek, offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not *to take thy* coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask *them* not again."[1] Jesus also taught that one should forgive one's brother's misdemeanour not only seven times but "seventy times seven"[2] and that "a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven."[3] Many more glamorous sayings of Jesus and other sermonizers can be cited here but none can be treated as a wholesome moral precept unless it is also accompanied by a practical example of the preacher. These would be merely sparkling gifts of the gab rather than examples of practical conduct. How can one forgive his enemies unless he has first subdued them? What does charity, benevolence and philanthrophy of a man mean, if he is not blessed with anything to spare? Just as the man who has not married and has no children and relations cannot be held forth as an ideal husband, or a loving father, or a gracious kinsman; how can one be taken as a model of mercy, kindliness and forgiveness if one had never had an opportunity to pardon anybody?

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1. Luke 6 : 27-30
2. Mt. 18 : 22
3. Mt. 19 : 23

Virtues are of two kinds: one is positive and the other negative. Living like an anchorite in a far off cave can, at the most, be reckoned as a negative virtue for the ascetics merely abstain from doing harm to others. But, what about the positive side of their actions? Do they help the poor, feed the hungry, raise the fallen or guide the erring? Forgiveness, charity, philanthrophy, hospitality, truthfulness, kindliness, zeal to restore truth and justice and fulfilment of one's obligations are some of the cardinal virtues requiring positive action. Virtues are, of a fact, more often positive than negative.

It would now be clear that there could be no "ideal life"—to be followed by others—unless its positive and practical aspect is also before us. How can we follow the example of any guide, if it is not illustrated? We want precedents for waging war and making peace, for leading our lives in affluence and poverty, for living as married couples and celibates, for our communion with God and social relationship with our fellow beings. In victory and defeat, in anger and forbearance, in loneliness and companionship, in short, in every situation of life marked by vicissitudes of our earthly existence we need an exemplar to show us the right path. We require practical examples of those who have successfully met these situations and hit upon a solution rather than those who have nothing to offer except sweet words. It is neither the poet's fancy nor the flower of speech, but an indisputable fact of history that no other life save that of Muhammad, the last Prophet of God, answers the test of practicality.

To recapitulate the essential ingredients of an ideal life, discussed afore, let me repeat that historicity, comprehensiveness, perfection and practicality are necessary for any character to be followed by others. I do not mean to say that other prophets lacked these qualities, but I do assert that the record of their lives and doings preserved by their followers and handed down to us throw no light on

these aspects of their character. This was in conformity with the will of God, perhaps, as it constitutes, in itself, an intrinsic evidence that the prophets of yore were sent to their own peoples and for their own times. Their biographies were not preserved because posterity did not need them. It was only Muhammad, the last of the prophets, who was sent by God for all the nations, as a shining example, to be followed by the entire humanity until the Day of Judgement. His biography, the record of his sayings and doings, had thus to be perdurable and everblooming, and this is the greatest testimony, a practical attestation of the finality of Muhammad's prophethood.

> "Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets ; and Allah is Aware of all things."[1]

1. Q : XXXIII : 40

THREE

HISTORICITY

Let us now have a closer look at the biography of the Prophet of Islam to see how far it answers the fourfold criteria earlier enunciated by me. The first of these is historicity.

The way Islam has safely preserved not merely the life story of its Prophet, but also everything even remotely connected with him, is simply a marvel of Islam. The people who have handed down, collected and codified the sayings and doings and other incidents of the life of the holy Prophet are known as narrators, traditionists and biographers; among these we find the companions of the Prophet, their sons and successors—scholars belonging to the period up to the fourth century of Islamic era. After all this material had been committed to writing, the biographical details of the narrators, that is, the antecedents and the characters of the people in any way connected with the transmission of the "narrations" relating to the Prophet were also put into writing. All this encyclopaedic compilation of about a hundred thousand biographical sketches is known as *Asmā-ur-Rijāl*. Dr. A. Springer, the celebrated German scholar, who was closely associated with the educational and literary activities of the Bengal Asiatic

Society till 1854, and who published the *Maghāzī* of Wāqīdī as edited by Von Kremer in 1856, also brought out the *Al-Isābah-fī-Tamīzis-Sahābah*, a collection of the biographies of the Prophet's companions by Hāfiz Ibn Hajar. As Dr. A. Sprenger claims that he was the first European to have written the *Life of Mohammad*[1] drawing his material from the original Arabic sources. Although Dr. A. Sprenger has written the Prophet's biography spitefully with a malicious glance, he had to acknowledge in his introduction to the *Isābah* the unsurpassable feat of Muslim historiography in these words.

> "The glory of the literature of the Mohammadans is its literary biography. There is no nation, nor there has been any which like them has during twelve centuries recorded the life of every man of letters. If the biographical records of the Mohammadans were collected, we should probably have accounts of the lives of half a million of distinguished persons, and it would be found that there is not a decennium of their history, nor a place of importance which has not its representatives."[2]

The Prophet had performed his last *Haj* known as the Farewell Pilgrimage with more than a hundred thousand companions who are called *sahābah*. History records the lives of about eleven thousand of these companions who have transmitted some saying or an act of the Prophet to others. Their narration of the *ahādith* or traditions of the Prophet of Islam has made them a part of recorded history.

The holy Prophet departed from this world in 11 A.H./ 632 A.D. while the elderly companions remained alive up to 40 A.H./660 A.D., although the juniors among them were then still quite numerous. It is reported that by the close of the

1. Published from Allahabad in 1851.
2. *Al-Isābah*, I, p. 1.

first century after *Hijrah* nearly all of them had breathed their last. We give here the names of the companions who were the last to close their eyes in different parts of the Islamic realm.

	Name	Place of death	Year (A.H./A.D).
1.	Abū Umāmah Bāhilī	Syria	86/705
2.	ʿAbd Allāh b. Hārith b. Jazr	Egypt	86/705
3.	ʿAbd Allāh b. Abū ʿAwfā	Kufa	87/705
4.	Sāyib b. Yazīd	Madina	91/709
5.	Anas b. Mālik	Basra	93/711

Anas b. Mālik, who was the last companion to receive the summons of death, was the personal servant of the Prophet and had served him for ten years at Madina.

The era of the companion's successors, who are known as *tābiyʾīn*, actually begins from the time of the Prophet's migration to Madina. They were the persons who had seen and conversed with some companion of the Prophet but not with the Prophet himself. Many of them had already been born when the Prophet was alive, but either being too young or being away from Madina, they had not shared the company of the Prophet. To name only a few, ʿAbdur Rahmān b. Hārith was born in 3/624, Qais b. Abī Hāzim in 4/625 and Saʿīd b. Musʿab in 5/626. Several others like them are regarded as companion's disciples. They had dispersed with the widening of Islamic frontiers, and taken up residence in far-flung areas, teaching and preaching the tenets of Islam and the practice of the Prophet learnt from their elders. Their number was fairly large, for, in Madina alone there were 139 of them who had taken lessons at the feet of elder companions of the Prophet. Besides these, Madina had 129 more who had learnt the Prophet's traditions from several companions, although their teachers were not reckoned among the elders; while another 87 had picked up information about the Prophet from one or two of his

companions only. There were, thus, 355 of them in Madina alone as reported by Ibn Saʿd. The number of the companions' disciples only in one city is sufficient to indicate their vast numbers spread over in Mecca, Taif, Basra, Kufa, Damascus, Yemen and Egypt.[1] These were the persons who had devoted themselves to preaching and disseminating the modes and manners of the Prophet. Now, if we assume that every companion had narrated at least a few sayings and doings of the Prophet to his disciples, which were all codified later on, what a large number of these narratives would have come to be recorded by then ! However, the number of traditions transmitted by some of the Prophet's companions, given here, would give a more exact idea of the great number of such reports.

	Name of companion	*Number of Traditions*
1.	Abū Huraira (d. 59/678)	5374
2.	ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās (d. 68/687)	2660
3.	ʿĀyesha (d. 58/677)	2220
4.	ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar (d. 73/692)	1630
5.	Jābīr b. ʿAbd Allāh (78/697)	1560
6.	Anas b. Mālik (d. 93/711)	1286
7.	Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī (d. 74/693)	1170

The traditions narrated by these masters, who were all close companions of the Prophet, form the chief source of the Prophet's biography. The years in which they died, point out the fact that they lived long enough after the demise of the holy Prophet to impart the knowledge possessed by them to a large number of persons. Those were the days when the knowledge of prophetic traditions was the only branch of learning enjoying recognition and

1. The number of Tābiyʿin in Mecca, Kufa and Basrah, as given by Ibn Sʿad was 131, 413 and 164 respectively. The last *tabiyʿee* was Khalaf b. Khalifah who died in 181 A.H./797 A.D. He was a disciple of ʿĀmir b. Wāʾlah, a companion of the Prophet.

patronage of the society, and warranted an honoured place in religious as well as worldly circles. Thousands of the Prophet's companions were thus acting on the dictum of their beloved Master who had ordained: "Disseminate whatever you hear from me," and "Inform those not present whatever you hear or see of me." They considered it a great purpose of their lives to educate their sons and successors, friends and acquaintances about the teachings of the Prophet. By the time this generation breathed its last, the keen desire and solicitude awakened by them brought up a new generation of enthusiastic learners and scholars, moved by an unbounded zeal to safeguard the precious treasure bequeathed to them by their precursors. The method of instruction in those days required that the students had to memorise every word of what they were taught and then to repeat it before being allowed to teach others. The Prophet had, while insisting on the propagation of his words and deeds, also warned them that 'he, who wilfully distorted his teachings or spread any false report about him would be doomed to perdition.' The result was that sometimes even eminent companions and erudite scholars were seen trembling all over to the fibre of their being while narrating any tradition, lest they should commit a mistake and earn eternal wrath of the Lord. ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd was so very careful that once when he narrated something about the Prophet, his face turned pale as death and then he hastily added: "The Prophet had spoken it thus or something like this."[1]

Strong memory was the nature's gift to the Arabs who normally used to fix in their mind hundreds of verses eulogising their tribes and forefathers and even the horses

1. This is the reason for use of the phrase 'God knows best', by the traditionists and Muslim writers, which is misunderstood by most of the orientalists as an indication of doubt and uncertainty. It speaks volumes of their understanding of Islam!

of good breed. Like every other human faculty, retentive memory is also strengthened by constant practice. The Prophet's companions and their successors, who were always eager to store in their minds the smallest detail pertaining to the Prophet, had developed this faculty to unbelievable perfection. They used to learn by heart every act and incident, words and deeds of the Prophet with the same care and scrupulousness as the Muslims still memorise the Qur'ān. Every traditionist could repeat, word for word, tens of thousands of traditions: and though he often committed them to writing, he could not expect to command the respect of others unless he could also reproduce them from his memory. Since consultation of one's writings was taken as an evidence of forgetfulness and was a discredit to a scholar, one normally kept such annotations for private use only.

Some orientalists, particularly Sir Willium Muir and Ignaz Goldziher, have raked together all possible doubts about the accuracy of the traditions, particularly in regard to their codification and compilation, which, they assert, were taken in hand ninety years after the death of the Prophet. I have explained here in some detail what meticulous and painstaking efforts were made by the companions of the Prophet, from the very first day, to ensure the accuracy of the traditions. Their trustworthiness, solicitude and carefulness are, of a fact, sufficient to set at rest all the doubts in this regard.[1]

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1. The doubts raised in recent years in regard to the authenticity of the *ahādith* by an influential school of western scholars constitutes, as Seyyed Hossein Nasr says, the most "vicious and insidious attack on Islam." The narrators of *ahādith* feared God in a way which most modern men can hardly imagine and it is psychologically absurd that, with a mentality to which the alternative of Heaven or Hell is the most real thing of all, they should commit the unpardonable sin of forging

[*Continued on next page*]

Neverthless, there were reasons, as I would presently tell you, for the diffidence of the companions to put the traditions into writing, at least, in the earlier stages.

The first reason was that in the initial stages the Prophet had forbidden to write anything save the sacred Scripture. The Prophet is related to have instructed his companions: "Do not write from me anything except the Qur'ān."[1] This command was meant for the commonalty in order to guard against the mixing up of the revelations with the traditions. But when the revelation was fairly completed and the people had learnt to distinguish between the two, the Prophet permitted the companions to take down what they heard from him.[2] There were, however, companions who ever remained overcautious and refrained from writing anything of the traditions for the fear of committing a mistake and thus incurring the displeasure of the Prophet.

Another reason, as referred to earlier, was the diffidence of the Arabs to write anything that ought to be memorised. Some of the companions held the view that once the narratives relating to the Prophet were put into writing, the people would give up the practice of learning them by heart. In their view, writing of anything made the people indolent, for, once a written record came into existence, people developed the habit of consulting it when need arose. The fear was not entirely unfounded, since,

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prophetic sayings. Nothing is less scientific than to project the modern mentality, which is an anomaly in history, on to a period when man lived and thought in a traditional world in which the verities of religion determined life itself, and in which man sought first and foremost to perform the most important duty placed upon their shoulders, namely, to save their souls." (Ideals and Realities of Islam, p. 81).

1. *Taqyid*, pp. 29-35.
2. *Al-Tabaqāt*, II, i, p. 125 : IV, i, p. 8 : VII, ii, p. 189 : *Al-Musnad*, II, pp. 162 192, 207, 215.

we see that as the annotations of traditions grew in number, scholars gradually gave up the practice of enshrining them in their memory. Later on, it did not remain a bar to the scholarship to rely entirely on written records.

The third reason was that the Arabs disliked to write anything and then get it to their heart by rote. To them, it was an evidence of short memory and, for that reason, if anybody ever took down something, he tried to hide it from others.

The earlier scholars were of the opinion that anything inscribed in the hearts of the people was much safer and more lasting than what was penned on paper. A written record was, in their view, always open to interpolation and destruction while something dwelling in the people's memory was beyond the reach of every intrusion.

For all that, it is a canard to assert that the reports about the Prophet's teachings, life and conduct were transmitted only by word of mouth for the first ninety or hundred years, as assumed by the orientalists. The reason for this erroneous assumption is that the *Muwatta* of Mālik b. Anas and the *Al-Maghāzī* of Ibn Is'hāq are generally taken as the first compilations on the Prophet's biography. Both these writers were contemporaries who died in 179/795 and 151/768 respectively, and hence these sciences were wrongly dated as originating in the second century after *Hijrah*. The facts are, however, otherwise, since there is ample evidence to prove that the compilation of these materials had started much earlier.

Caliph ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, who died in the year 101/719, was himself a noted scholar and had been the governor of Madina before his nomination as Caliph in 99/717. Immediately after ascending the caliphate, he sent an edict to Qāzī Abū Bakr b. Muhammad b. ʿAmr b. Hazm al-Ansārī (d. 117/735) saying: "Start compiling the traditions of the Prophet, for I fear that these will be lost

gradually."[1] The command[2] of Umar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, mentioned in the *Tabaqāt* of al-Bukhārī, *Muwatta* of Mālik and *Musnad* of Dārimī, was executed by Qāzī Abū Bakr who compiled all the available reports and submitted them to the Caliph. Copies of this compilation were sent to all the provincial capitals of the Islamic empire.[3] Qāzī Abū Bakr was specially selected for the job since he was then Qāzī at Madina. An additional reason for his selection was that his mother's sister, ʿAmra, was the chief disciple of ʿAyesha, the wife of the Prophet and the mother of believers, and thus whatever the former had learnt from her venerable mentor bad already been committed into writing by Qāzī Abū Bakr. Caliph ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAziz had accordingly asked him to pay particular attention to codify the traditions transmitted by ʿAyesha.

There is, in fact, sufficient evidence to show that several reports of the commands and utterances, events and incidents relating to the Prophet had been compiled even during his life-time. On the occasion of the peaceful occupation of Mecca, the holy Prophet had delivered a sermon. Al-Bukārī and several other traditionists report that on the request of Abū Shāh, a companion hailing from Yemen, the

1. *Al-Dārimī*, I, p. 126, *Al-Tabaqāt al-Kabir*, VIII, p. 353; *al-Saghir*, p. 105.
2. Orientalists like Guillaume, Ruth, Goldziher and Schacht have expressed doubts about the trustworthiness of his report, but they have failed to take notice of the fact that ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAziz had directed not only Abū Bakr b. Muhammad b. Amar b. Hazm but also Al-Zuhri (*Bukhārī al-Saghir*, p. 105) and others (Ibn Hajar, *Fath-al-Bāri*, I, p. 204) to collect the traditions. In fact, Al-Zuhri agreed to allow making copies of his own compilation by his students on the persuasion of ʿUmar b. ʿAbd-al-ʿAzīz. A lengthy quotation from the work of Zuhri, compiled and sent to other centres under the orders of ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, is preserved by Abū ʿUbaid al-Qāsim b. Sallām. (Amwāl, p. 578-581).
3. *Bayān al-ʿIlm*, p. 38; *Ajjaj*, p. 494.

Prophet had caused the sermon to be transcribed from him.[1] The Prophet of Islam had also sent letters to several emperors and rulers of the countries around Arabia inviting them to embrace Islam.[2] A few years back, the letter addressed by the Prophet to Muqauqis of Egypt was discovered within the hard cover of a book preserved in a local monastery. The photostatic copy of the letter, since published, confirms the content of reports transmitted by the early scholars of traditions, word for word, leaving no doubt about its authenticity.[3] What else can one demand for the authenticity and trustworthiness of the traditionists? Abū Huraira is once reported to have claimed that nobody except ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀs possessed a larger collection of the traditions than he had, but it was because the latter took down what he heard from the Prophet while Abū Huraira did not do so.[4] Another tradition preserved in *As-Sunan Abū Dāwūd* and *Musnad Ibn Hanbal* says that ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr had, on one occasion, discontinued

1. *Al-Sahīh. Kitāb-al-ʿIlm*, III p. 49; *As-Sunan*, 24, 3 (*Kitāb-al-ʿIlm* 4-5), *Al-Jāmi*, 12, 2 (*Kitāb al-ʿIlm*).
2. The Prophet had sent a number of letters to different rulers. The original letter of the Prophet to Heraclius was in Spain for long centuries; it has reappeared now but remains to be studied scientifically. The original letter to Muqauqis of Egypt is preserved, and is now in the Topkapi Museum at Istanbul. The Nagus of Abyssinia was also recipient of several letters from the Prophet, one of which exists at Damascus. Half a dozen or more letters of the Prophet's correspondence with Al-Mundhir b. Sāwā, the ruler of Bahrain, have been recorded in history, including one whose original has come down to us. It was first published from Berlin (*Muhammad Rasūlullah*, pp. 97-105).
3. c. f. for photos and discussion *see* Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah's *Le Prophete de l'Islam*, pp. 205-7, 212-16, 235-37. Also *see* Islamic Culture, October, 1939, pp. 427-39.
4. *Al-Sahīh, Kitāb al-ʿIlm*. ʿAmr b. al-Ās named his book *al-Sahīfah al-Sādiqā* which he wrote after obtaining the permission of the Prophet to record events and traditions from him. (*Hadith Literature*, pp. 43-44)

reducing the traditions into writing. It is related that an objection was raised that it was improper to take down everything for the Prophet was, at times, in different frames of mind, happy or angry, and some of the remarks might not be actually meant for guidance of the people not present on the occasion. Later on, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr raised the matter with the Prophet, who, pointing to his lips, replied, "You can write. Whatever comes out of them is just and right."[1] ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr once remarked that of the two things for which he wanted God to grant him life, one was the *Sādiqā* in which he had written down whatever he had heard from the Prophet in his own words.[2] On another occasion, when Mujāhid enquired from ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr about *Sādiqā*, the latter replied, "This is *Sādiqā* in which I have written down the Prophet's words as I heard them from him. Nobody intervenes in it between me and the Prophet."[3]

Al-Bukhārī records a tradition that a few months after migration to Medina, the Prophet had ordered to take a census of the Muslims. The names thus recorded numbered one thousand five hundred.[4] Rules and tariffs of the *zakāt*, covering two pages were got written by the Prophet for being sent to the Qādīs and tax collectors appointed by him. Copies of this document were preserved, for a long time, by Abū Bakr, descendants of ʿAmr b. Hazm and several other persons.[5] Caliph ʿAlī also possessed certain written documents containing traditions of the Prophet bearing on the *sharīʿah* rules, which he used to keep in his scabbard and had shown to several persons.[6] Another written document was the treaty of Hudaibiyah, drawn up in 6/628.

1. *Al-Sunan*, II, p. 77 ; *As-Sahīh*, *Kitāb al-ʿIlm*, p. 39.
2. *Al-Dārimī*, p. 69
3. *Al-Sunan*, II, ii, pp. 125, 202
4. *Al-Sahīh*, *Kitāb-ul-Jihād*
5. *Al-Dāraqutnī*, *Kitāb-uz-Zakāt*, p. 209
6. *Al-Sahīh*, II, pp. 1020, 1084

It was committed into writing by ʿAlī b. Abī Tālib at the instance of the Prophet who had kept a copy of it and made over another to the Quraish of Mecca.[1] The instructions in regard to obligatory prayers, charity, blood-money, etc. were sent by the Prophet to ʿAmr b. Hazm, the governor of Yemen.[2] Another letter containing instructions about dead animals was sent by the Prophet to ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Hakīm.[3] The Prophet also gave written instructions in regard to prayers, fasting, usury, drinking, etc. to a companion, Wāʾil b. Hajr, when the latter departed for his home town in Hadhrmaut.[4] Once Caliph ʿUmar had an occasion to enquire from the people about the Prophet's practice in regard to blood money payable to the widows of the deceased. Al-Dhhāk b. Sufyān answered the question on the basis of a document which had been sent to his tribe by the Prophet.[5]

Caliph ʿUmr b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz sent an emissary to Madina, to obtain the document about rules of *zakāt*. It was found with the successors of ʿAmr b. Hazm.[6] The letters sent by the Prophet to Yemen contained instructions about recitation of the Qurʾān, emancipation of slaves and divorce.[7] When Maʿāz was deputed by the Prophet to Yemen for religious instruction of the people there, he enquired in a letter whether *zakāt* was payable on vegetables grown by the cultivators. The reply sent by the Prophet forbade him to levy the tax in that case.[8]

When Marwān once said, during the course of his

1. *Al-Tabaqāt, Kitāb-ul-Maghāzī*, p. 71, *Al-Sahīh*, p. 64, 45, *ibn Hishām*, p. 747.
2. *Kanz al-Ummʿāl*, III, p. 186
3. *Al-Saghīr*, p. 217
4. *Ibid*, p. 242.
5. *Al-Dāraqutnī*, p. 485
6. *Ibid*, p. 451.
7. *Al-Dārimī*, p. 293
8. *Ibid*, p. 45

sermon that Mecca was a sanctuary, Rafeʿy b. Khadīj immediately corrected him by declaring that Madina also enjoyed the same privilege for he had a written document of the Prophet to that effect with him.[1] Dahhāk b. Qais had, on one occasion, enquired from another companion, Al-Nʿumān b. Bashīr, about the *sūrah* of the Qur'ān normally recited by the Prophet in Friday prayers. The letter sent in reply by the latter said that the Prophet recited the chapter of *Hal ʿAtāka* in these prayers.[2] Caliph ʿUmar sent a written instruction to ʿUtbah b. Farqad saying that the Prophet had forbidden the use of silk.[3]

These are some of the written directions sent by the Prophet or his immediate successors, from time to time, to the governors, Qādīs, tax-collectors and others. Evidence is also not lacking to show that some of the prominent companions had desired and actually compiled a set of such instructions. Caliph Abū Bakr had also made a collection but on reconsideration he destroyed the same.[4] ʿUmar ibn al-Khattāb, the second Caliph, intended to make arrangements for the compilation of the Prophet's traditions. Although he was aware of the fact that his son, ʿAbd Allāh, had made such a collection with the permission of the Prophet, which was very often consulted by others, he finally gave up the idea lest it should be construed as an innovation.[5] Historians record the existence of a collection of juristic opinions pronounced by Caliph ʿAlī, which was later on presented to Ibn ʿAbbās.[6] The traditions compiled by ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās were copied out by certain persons belonging to Tā'if. They also showed it to

1. *Al-Musnad*, IV, p. 141
2. *Muslim*, II, p. 323
3. *Ibid*, p. 307
4. *Tadhkirat al-Huffāz*, I, p. 5
5. *Al-Jāmʿī*, p. 586
6. *Muslim*, *Introd.*

him for correction and confirmation of the text.[1] Saʿīd b. Jubair is also reported to have made a copy of the collection of ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbas.[2] A reference has been made of the *Sādiqa* of ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀs. It is possible to trace this work in the *ahādith* narrated by ʿAmr b. Shuʿaib as he utilized his grandfather ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr's books.[3] He was criticised by the scholars since he used to read it out instead of being able to rehearse the same from memory.[4] Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr was a Madinian disciple of the Prophet. Jābir's disciple Wahāb b. Munabbīh had compiled a *Sahīfa* under his teacher's guidance which was later on transmitted to several scholars,[5] one of whom was Ismāʿīl b. ʿAbd al-Karīm. Another collection of Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh's traditions was compiled by Sulaimān b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Qais al-Yashkurī who had three disciples, Abū al-Zubair, Abū Sufyān and Shoʿaibī, all of whom rose as eminent scholars in the generation succeeding the companions.[6] Sulaiman b. Samurah inherited a large collection of traditions from his father, Samurah b. Jundab, who was a companion of the Prophet.[7] This was later on transmitted to others by Sulaimān's son, Habīb.[8] Abū Hurairah is credited with the transmission of largest number of traditions among the Prophet's companions. One of his disciples, Hammām b. Munabbīh compiled a collection of traditions learnt from his teacher, which was known as *Sahīfah Hammām* and was incorporated in the second

1. *Al-Jāmī, Kitāb al-ʿIlal*, p. 691
2. *Al-Dārimī*, p. 69
3. *Al-Jāmī*, I, p. 43.
4. *Al-Tahdhīb*, VIII, p. 49
5. *Al-ʿIlal*, I, p. 318 ; *Al-Tahdhib*, II, p. 215
6. *Al-Tahdhīb*, I, p. 316
7. *Ibid.* VI, p. 211
8. *Al-Tahdhib*, IV p. 198. A part of this work is still preserved in *Mʿujam al-Kabīr* of al-Tabrānī.

volume of Ibn Hanbal's *Musnad* (from pages 312 to 318).[1] Bashīr b. Nahīk was another pupil of Abū Hurairah who had made a collection of his traditions and even got it confirmed by Abū Hurairah before transmitting it to others.[2] Abū Hurairah once showed this collection to some one, who reported that the compilation was not in the handwriting of Abū Hurairah.[3]

Anas b. Mālik, who served the Prophet throughout his life, has narrated a large number of traditions. He used to advise his sons to take down the *ahādith* narrated by him.[4] A lady named Salamā relates that she had seen ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās taking down the traditions from Abū Rāfʿey, a servant of the Prophet.[5] Wāqidi is one of the earliest biographers of the Prophet. He says that he had seen the letter sent by the Prophet to Al-Mundhir b. Sāwā, the Chief of Bahrain, in a heap of books of Ibn ʿAbbās.[6] The historian Tabarī is on record that a detailed account of the battle of Badr was written by ʿUrwah b. Zubair for Caliph ʿAbd Al-Malik.[7]

ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd used to attend upon the Prophet and had the permission to call upon him at any time. He did not approve of the writing of traditions and complained that although, in his view, nothing except the Qur'ān should be committed to writing, people came to enquire from him about the Prophet and then wrote down whatever they

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1. Two manuscripts of this *Sahīfa*, a Berlin MSS and a Damascus MSS have since been discovered and published with an English rendering by Dr. M. Hamidullah under the auspices of Centre Cultural Islamique, Paris. Recent researches have shown that out of 138 narrations in the *Sahīfa Hammām*, as many as 98 were drawn by Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.
2. *Al-ʿIlal*, p. 691; *Al-Dārimī*, p. 68
3. *Fath-al-Bārī*, I, pp. 184-185
4. *Al-Dārimī*, p. 68; *Taqyīd*, p. 96
5. *Al-Tabaqāt*, II, ii, p. 123.
6. *Zād-al-Maʿād*, II, p. 57
7. *Tārikh Tabarī*, p. 1285

heard from him.[1] Saʿīd b. Jubair says that whenever he heard anything about the Prophet from ʿAbd Allah b. ʿUmar and Ibn ʿAbbās in the night he took down notes and then made a fair copy in the morning.[2] Al-Barā b. ʿĀzib was a companion of the Prophet. Students used to take down his lectures.[3] Nāfʿi, an emancipated slave of Ibn ʿUmar, had been in the company of his master for thirty years. He used to dictate traditions to his disciples.[4] ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd had a collection of traditions which was shown by his son ʿAbd al-Rahmān to several persons[5]. Saʿīd b. Jubair is on record that whenever there was a conflict of opinion between him and his friends, he used to record it and then sought a clarification from Ibn ʿUmar, although he never showed the writing to Ibn ʿUmar for he was against the recording of traditions.[6] Al-Aswad was a young man among the descendants of the Prophet's companions. He relates that once he found a written collection of the traditions and called upon Ibn ʿUmar with his friend ʿAlqamah, but Ibn ʿUmar erased it completely.[7] Zaid b. Thābit acted as Prophet's amanuensis and was later on charged with the responsibility of making an authorised copy of the Qur'ān by Caliph ʿUthmān. He also did not approve of the writing of traditions. Therefore, in order to get the traditions known to him put into writing, Marwān got a scribe seated behind a curtain and asked Zaid b. Thābit to relate whatever he knew about the Prophet.[8] Caliph Muʿāwiyah, too, once attempted to have some traditions recorded from him in the same manner but Zaid b. Thābit got the scent and insisted on

1. *Al-Dārimī*, p. 69
2. *Ibid*, p. 69
3. *Ibid*, p. 69; *Al-ʿIlal*, I; p. 42, *Taqyīd*. p. 105
4. *Al-Dārimī*, p. 69
5. *Al-Jāmʿi*, I, p. 17
6. *Ibid*. I, p. 33
7. *Ibid*. I. p. 33.
8. *Ibid*. I, p. 33

erasing what had been written.[1]

Enough facts about the original sources have been cited to leave no shadow of doubt about the existence of authentic and reliable material available for the Prophet's biography. The quotations and references given here settle the matter that if written records were sufficient to warrant authenticity of historical facts, a vast fund of these records had been left by the Prophet's companions. They not only wrote them but also taught their successors who incorporated everything learnt by them in their own writings. It is to be noted that the generation following the Prophet's companions collected and compiled every incident during the life-time of their teachers. They enquired about every occurrence, every happening personally from door to door, from men and women, from the young and the old, and recorded every fact for further research and verification by the later generations. Muhammad b. Muslim b. Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741), Hishām b. ʿUrwah (d. 146/763), Qais b. Abī Hāzim, ʿAtā b. Abū Rabāh (d. 117/735), Saʿīd b. Jubair al-Asdī (d. 95/713) and ʿAbd Allāh b. Dhakwān Abū al-Zinād (d. 130/747) were among the hundreds of those belonging to the sons and successors of the Prophet's companions who worked incessantly, as if under the cast of an spell, and collected a sweeping data which gives us a panoramic view of the holy Prophet's life, times and happenings. Shihāb al-Zuhrī, a great authority on the traditions, inscribed everything he came to know about the Prophet. Abū Al-Zinād relates that he recorded only the injunctions of the Prophet relating to things made lawful or unlawful by him while Al-Zuhrī wrote everything he came to know.[2] Ibn Kaisān, another colleague of Al-Zuhrī, says that he took down only the sayings and doings of the Prophet, while al-Zuhrī insisted on recording everything about the Prophet's

1. Al-Musnad, V, p. 182
2. *Al-Jāmiʿ*, p. 37

companion too. "For he considered that everything pertaining to the companions was a part of *sunnah*," adds Ibn Kaisān, "he was crowned with success while I came to nothing."[1]

Mohammad b. Muslim b. Shihāb Al-Zuhrī, whose writings were acquired by the government after the fall of Umayyads on the death of Caliph Walīd b. Yazīd (126/743), was only one of the hundreds of his learned compatriots who had applied themselves to the task of collecting traditions. He was born in 50 A.H. (670 A.D.) and died in 124 A.H. (741 A.D.). A Quraishi by descent, he was a keen and diligent student. The trouble he took to collect everything about the Prophet's life is amply borne out by the testimony of his colleagues. It is related that he used to meet every Ansārī in Madina and ask him to relate whatever incident of the Prophet's life was known to him. He thus met every one whom he could approach, men, women, old and young, and recorded full, complete and comprehensive statements after their verification, with the names of informants. This was the time when a large number of the Prophet's companions were still alive, and he profited from all of them. Similarly, he had numerous disciples whom he taught and dictated his traditions. Al-Zuhrī's life is only illustrative of the great interest shown in the recording and compilation of *ahādith* in his time, for many other young men besides him had wholeheartedly applied themselves to the task.

That the compilation of *hadīth* literature was taken up by *tābiy'īn*, i.e. the sons and disciples of the Prophet's companions, there has been a widespread misunderstanding amongst the people not well-versed with the science, such as, the orientalists. They deduce from it that since many companions remained alive by the closing decades of the first century after *Hijrah*, the compilation of *hadīth* by the *tābiy'īn* would have been initiated in the second century of

1. *Al-Tabaqāt*, II, II, p. 135; *Taqyīd*, p. 107

the Islamic era.[1] This is far from truth. *Tābiyʿīn* are the persons who did not have the opportunity of the Prophet's company, but who had conversed and were associated with the companions of the Prophet. As already stated, the term applies even to those persons who had been born during the lifetime of the Prophet but were either too young or could not somehow wait upon the Apostle, or were born immediately after his death. Thus every such person born around 11 AH, when the Prophet left this fleeting world, would be known as a *tābiyʿee*. The era of *tābiyʿīn*, thus, begins immediately after the Prophet's demise in 11 AH, or even earlier, and not a hundred years thereafter. It is also a fallacy to think that the *tābiyʿīn* took up compilation of *hadīth* literature after a hundred years, when all the companions of the Prophet had left the world. The period after the death of the Prophet to the end of the first century after *Hijrah* is really coterminous with the *tābiyʿīn's* period, for none could claim that honour after every companion of the Prophet had bidden farewell to this world. It would now be clear how grievously mistaken are they who claim that the compilation of *hadīth* literature was started a hundred years after the Prophet's death.

The period during which collection and compilation of the traditions and the related historical data was completed can be divided into three parts. The first extends to the period when the people having first-hand information themselves collected the whole data. Then comes the period when a number of persons took upon themselves the collection and recording of these eye-and-ear-witness accounts by contacting the companions possessing this first-hand information. Finally, in the third phase, the

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1. For a detailed account of the writings of *ahādīth* by the Prophet's companions and those of their successors in the first century A.H. see pages 34-106 of *'Studies in Early Hadīth Literature'* by Dr. M. M. ʿĀzamī.

writing of the treatises existing today was taken up. The duration of the first phase stretches, more or less, up to the close of the first century after *Hijrah*; the second lasts up to 150 A.H.; and the third extends from 150 A.H. to the opening decades of the fourth century. Thus the first phase coincides with the time of the Prophet's companions and elders among the *tābiyʾīn*, the second co-exists with the younger *tābiyʿīn* and the disciples of the elder *tābiyʿīn*, and the third was the period when the traditionists like Muhammad b. Ismāʿil al-Bukhārī, Muslim b. Al-Hajjāj al-Qushairi, Muhammad b. ʿIsā Tirmidhī, and Ahmad b. Muhammad ibn Hanbal wrote their works after digesting the then available material. It would also be clear from what has been explained here that the *hadīth* material collected in the first phase, that is, by the Prophet's companions and elder *tābiyʿīn* was incorporated in the writings of the second phase, and this was in turn utilised for the compilation of dissertations in the third phase. We still have the written record of the second and third phases which is the most precious, authentic and trustworthy material possessed by history. No other historical material of past events extant today is so methodical, continuous and reliable as the *hadīth* literature.

My revered teacher, the late ʿAllāmā Shiblī, who was also a historian of repute, used to say that almost every other nation had had to record its oral traditions, very often after an interlude of centuries between the happenings and their being put into writing, for the compilation of its history. What they normally did in almost every case was to jot down every prattle and retail gossip without caring to know the sources of those stories. Thereafter probable events were selected by historians through the process of elimination of the incredible reports, and this is how the history of every nation has come to be written. The ancient annals of the European nations are no exception.

The criterion for historicity set by the Muslims was much more severe, however. Its first principle was that the initial narrator of any event, from whom a narration was handed down, should be an eye-witness to the happening recounted by him. Similarly, if there was a chain of narrators who have transmitted the information from one person to another, the characters and antecedents of each should be fully known.[1] It required the scholars to satisfy themselves about the moral conduct, intelligence and reliability of each intervening narrator. It was, of a fact, a Herculean task to find out all these details about hundreds of thousand persons who formed the chain in the transmission of *aḥādīth*, but the scholars devoted their lives to the task. They wandered from one city to another, met every one acquainted with the narrator of even one tradition and gathered all the requisite information about the transmitting links of *aḥādīth*. And, thus came into existence what is called the science of *asmā-ur-rijāl*, or the dictionary of biographers, which sheds light on the lives of at least one hundred thousand persons connected, in any way, with the transmission of the Prophet's traditions.

This was, however, the principle laid down for verification of the antecedents and reliability of the narrators. Rules were also framed for internal criticism and evaluation of the reports handed down by the narrators. These were meant to evaluate, rationally, the correctness of the content of every narration. However, the scholars gave foremost

1. Purporting to be scientific and applying the so-called historical method some Western scholars like Schacht have claimed that the *isnād* i. e. the transmitting links of the *aḥādīth* were forged later on. Apart from the fact that these scholars normally take up the books of history or jurisprudence—by no means a right field for the study of *isnād*—instead of the *ḥadīth* literature, their theory of "projecting back" of the *isnād* is refuted by their own studies which show a number of transmitters belonging to scores of provinces giving the same *isnād* for a particular tradition. For a detailed examination of the subject see chapter VI of the *Studies in Early Ḥadīth Literature*.

priority to the reliability of the narrators, and were so candidly honest in giving their verdicts about them that their endeavours should be deemed to form a shining chapter of the Islamic history. Among the narrators of traditions, there were also kings and powerful potentates who ruled with an iron hand, but the scholars of *hadīth*, knowing not what fear was, accorded them the place they rightfully deserved by virtue of their personal character, piety and truthfulness or otherwise. Imām Wakʿī was a traditionist whose father presided over the state exchequer. Wakʿī used to accept traditions handed down by his father only when he found another reliable narrator to support his father, and rejected them if they were narrated by his father alone.[1] Masʿūdī was another scholar of *hadīth* who was paid a visit by another scholar, Muʿādh b. Muʿādh, in 154 A.H. (770 A.D.), but since Masʿūdī had to consult his writings in the course of narrating *ahādīth*, Muʿādh was not satisfied with his memory and had no hesitation in declaring him as untrustworthy.[2] On one occasion Muʿādh b. Muʿadh was offered ten thousand gold *dinārs* merely for withholding evidence in regard to the reliability or otherwise of a certain person, but he turned down the offer contemptuously with the remark: "I can never conceal what is right."[3] Is there any example of similar candidness and veracity in the annals of other nations?

Strange though it may seem, this entire material of encyclopaedic proportions, consisting of reports considered correct or incorrect, authentic or spurious by the scholars who accepted some and rejected others, is available even today for being sifted and evaluated by us in accordance with the principles laid down for their examination.

The discussion relating to the primary historical data

1. *Al-Tahdhīb*, XI, p. 30
2. *Ibid*, VI, 211
3. *Ibid*, VI, p. 231

of the Prophet's biography, important though wearisome it might have appeared to you, has taken too much of the time of this lecture; nevertheless, the matter-of-fact nature of this record demonstrates how very methodical and verifiable is this material. Now let us explain what constitutes the extant sources for the biography of the Prophet of Islam and how were these put together. The first and the foremost source, which is most authentic and reliable is the Qur'ān itself whose veracity remains unchallenged even by the most inveterate enemies of Islam. All the important facts about the life of the Prophet, his character and deportment prior to his being invested with the mantle of prophethood, his poverty and orphanhood, his search for truth and bestowal of apostleship, the coming of revelations and the announcement of his mission, his preaching of the faith and enmity of the infidels, his ascension and migration, his wars and conduct of peaceful negotiations, his character and deportment, in short, every important fact and event of his life finds a reference in this Book which is peerless in its undisputed origin and genuineness.

The second major source is the great mass of traditions, numbering about a hundred thousand, inclusive of all the correct as well as the so-called incorrect reports.[1] Out

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1. It would be relevant to mention here, briefly, the misunderstanding purposely created by almost every Western orientalist. They are never weary of pointing out the large number of traditions rejected by the earlier scholars as a proof of the unreliability of the entire *hadith* literature. It is contended, for example, that the fact that Ibn Hanbal selected 30,000 out of 7,50,000 traditions and Al-Bukhārī had made his collection from a collection of six hundred thousand, shows that it was all a mass of forgeries and dubious reports. [c.f. A. Guillaume, *Islam*, Penguine Series, pp. 66, 91; Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, London (1894). Vol. I p. xxxvii, R. A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Cambridge (1962), p. 146; HAR Gibbs, *Mohammadanism*, London '1964), p. 79]. The problem, so puzzling to the orientalists is, however, more an evidence of their

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of these were compiled the *Sihāh* or the six authentic books of *ahādīth* after careful sifting and evaluation of each report according to the historical and subjective canons of criticism. There are also other compilations known as *musnads*, the largest of which is the *al-Musnad* of Ibn

slipshod approach to the science than the unauthenticity of the traditions. The traditions do not include only the utterances, deeds and tacit approval of the acts done in the presence of the Prophet but they also cover similar reports in regard to the companions and their successors. Then, every single report transmitted through different channels of narrators, which sometimes run to a hundred or more [c. f. Mustafa Sibā'ī, *Al-Sunnah wa Makāna-tuha fī al-Islām*, Cairo (1390/1961), p.224], is counted as a separate *hadīth* for purposes of its evaluation. It is, thus, not at all surprising if about 10,000 reports handed down by about 4000 companions of the Prophet were multiplied into several hundreds of thousand narrations by the scholars in order to facilitate their scrutiny. Naturally, if a traditionist selects a particular *hadīth* as authentic because of its more trustworthy narrators, and rejects the reports of other narrators containing almost or even exactly the same narration, it does not mean that all the other reports rejected by him are 'unauthentic' or 'spurious'. In fact, Al-Bukhārī or any other compiler of *ahādith* never claimed that what had been left out by him was spurious or lacked authenticity. According to the criteria laid down for the criticism of traditions, the traditionists first make a search about the *isnād* or chain of narrators of a report, and they call it defective, without any further scrutiny of the subject matter, if it falls short of their stern criteria of historical criticism. Dr. Mohammad Mustafa ʿAzamī has given in his *'Studies in Early Hadīth Literature'*, a collection of traditions, transmitted by Bishr b. al-Husain on the authority of Zakariyā b. ʿAdī from Anas b. Mālik from the Prophet, (pp. 305-310). It has traditions rejected as unreliable, though about one quarter of these traditions handed down by other narrators are found in Bukhārī and Muslim's *Sahīh* collections. In other words, Bukhārī and Muslim have accepted identical reports with more satisfactory *isnād*. The only reason for discarding these traditions was that one of the narrators, Zakariya, did not hear them himself from Anas. Even though the reports of Zakariyā were supported or corroborated by other channels, these were not accepted by the traditionists for they fell short of their canon of

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Hanbal consisting of six voluminous parts of about 500 pages each printed in small Egyptian type. It lists separately all the authentic traditions pertaining to the Prophet and handed down by various companions and throws a floodlight on the life and character of the Prophet.

The journals of the battles fought by the Prophet, known as *maghāzī*, constitute the third important source for the biographies of the Prophet. Written mainly to record the events relating to expeditions and battles, these contain many interesting details not found elsewhere. The oldest books of *maghāzī* were written by ʿUrwah b. Al-Zubair (d. 94/712), Muhammad b. Muslim b. Shihāb al-Zuhri (d. 124/741), Mūsā b. ʿUqbah (d. 141/758), Ibn Is'hāq (d. 150/767), Ziyād al-Bakā'ī (d. 182/798) and Muhammad b. ʿUmar al-Wāqidī (d. 207/825).

Fourthly, the books of history associated with the life and times of the Prophet are an invaluable source for the biographers. The more reliable, as well as detailed ones, are the annals known as the '*Al-Tabaqāt*' of Ibn Sa d (d. 230/844), the celebrated *Tārīkh ar-Rasūl Wal Malūk* by Muhammad b. Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and two more works of Al-Bukhārī entitled *Al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr* and *Al-Tārīkh al-Saghīr*. To this category of early historical works also belong the annals written by Ibn Ḥibbān and Ibn Abī Khuthaima (d. 99/717) of Baghdad.

The works describing the miracles and spiritual attainments of the Prophet, known as *kutub-i-dalā'il*, have been

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historical criticism. Actually, the matter cannot but impress an honest scholar and strengthen his trust and reliance on the books of *ahādīth*, but nothing can convince those who more often deliberately mistranslate the reports and then produce them as an evidence of the unauthentic character of the *ahādīth*. It is also equally surprising that modern Western writers hardly ever pay any attention to the reseaches exploding these charges and go on repeating them *ad nauseam*, without least regard to their pretensions of unbiased and sympathetic approach to Islam.

compiled by a number of scholars. The notable among these, which also form a source material for the Prophet's biographical accounts, are the two *Dalā'il-an-Nabūwāt* by Ibn Qutaibah (d. 276/889) and Abū Is'hāq Harabī (d. 255/868), the *Dalā'ils* of Imām Baihaqī (d. 430/1038), Abū Nua'im Isbahānī (d. 430/1038), Al-Mustaghfarī (d. 432/1040) and Abul Qāsim Ismāᶜil Isbahānī (d. 535/1140), and, finally, the *Khasāis-ul-Kubra*, a more detailed dissertation by Imām Suyūtī.

Yet another category of works containing a rich treasure of biographical data relating to the Prophet are the books known as *shamā'il*, for these are exclusively meant to portray the morals, habits, manners and character of the holy Prophet of Islam. The first and the best known among these is the *As-Shamā'il* of Muhammad b. ᶜIsā Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) on which scores of commentaries were later written by reputed scholars. Another scholarly and voluminous work is *Al-Shifā fi-Huqūq al-Mustafā* written by Qādī ᶜAiyāz. A commentary on it was written by Shahāb Khafājī under the title of *Nasīm-ur-Riyāz*. Other treatises on the subject are *Shamā'il an-Nabī* by Abul ᶜAbbās Mustaghfarī (d. 432/1040) and *Shamā'il an-Nūr as-Sāteᶜy* by Ibn al-Muqrī (d. 253/876) and *Safar al-Saᶜādah* by Mujd-uddin Fīrozābādī (d. 817/1414).

Finally, there are the books purporting to be annals of Mecca and Madina which give, besides the chronicles of these cities, the conditions obtaining during the life-time of the Prophet and similar other details. These constitute the seventh source for the Prophet's biography. The oldest historical works of this nature are the *Akhbār-i-Mecca* by Al-Azraqī (d. 223/837) and *Akhbār-i-Madīna* by ᶜUmar b. Shaiba (d. 262/875). Two more works of the same name are by Fākehī and Ibn Dhabālā.

This brief sketch of the historical records and sources of the biographical works about the Prophet is sufficient to convince everybody, whether a friend or a foe, about the

authentic character of this material. You would have noticed that the great traditionists of the past did not rely merely on the memories and oral reports but they also established study circles in the mosques and *madrasās* for the study of traditions and the *maghāzī*. ʿAsim b. ʿUmar b. Qatādah (d. 121/737) was the grandson of one of the Prophet's companions, Qatādah Ansārī. He wrote books on *maghāzī* and *siyar* and also delivered lectures to a group of students in the mosque of Damascus in pursuance of an order given by Caliph ʿUmar b. Abd al- Azīz. Actually, the number of the Prophet's biographies written right from his own times to this day in different countries and languages would be several thousand. In Urdu alone there would be several hundred such monographs although its literary history does not go beyond two hundred years, at the most, and serious dissertations in this language actually came to be written only after the upheaval of 1857.

For it is a cardinal principle of the Muslims' faith to pay their regard to the illustrious Prophet, let us turn our attention to the endeavours made by the followers of other religions to study the life of Muhammad. A number of Hindus, Sikhs, Brahmo Samājīs and others in India have written the biographies of the holy Prophet. Europe has also had a long tradition, despite its hatred towards Islam, of the studies undertaken in this field, even though these were more often taken up for serving the needs of evangelism or for historical and literary purposes. *Al-Muqtabas*, a literary magazine of Damascus, published a list of European works on the life of the P ophet, some fifteen or sixteen years back, which listed thirteen hundred books.[1] Prof. D. S. Margoliouth, who was a teacher of Arabic in the Oxford University, had written a biography of the Prophet, which was published in the series of the Heroes of Nations

1. The number should have at least been doubled during the past fifty years.

in 1906. No exposition more inimical has ever been brought out with a confessedly Jewish bias by any other biographer of the Prophet, at least in the English language, for the author has left no stone unturned to cull out something from the original sources to distort everything connected with the life and teachings of Muhammad, yet he had to acknowledge in his introduction to the book that—

> "The biographers of the Prophet Mohammad form a long series which it is impossible to end, but in which it would be honourable to find a place."[1]

There is, also, a sympathetic Christian biographer John Devenport, who begins his biography of the Prophet entitled 'An Apology for Muhammad and the Qur'ān'[2] with an acknowledgement of the fact that of all the law-makers and conquerors there is not one the events of whose life are more true and more detailed than those of the Prophet Muhammad.

R. Bosworth Smith, late Fellow of Trinity College of Oxford, delivered a series of lectures on 'Muhammad and Muhammadanism' under the auspices of the Royal Institution of Great Britain in February and March, 1874. He says in his lectures which were later on enlarged and published under the same title.

> "And, what is true of religion generally, is also true, unfortunately, of those three religions which I have called, for want of a better name, historical —and of their founders. We know all too little of the first and earliest labourers; too much, perhaps, of those who have entered into their labours. We know less of Zoroaster and Confucious than we do of Solon and Socrates; less of Moses and Buddha than we do of Ambrose and Augustine. We know indeed some fragments of a fragment of Christ's life; but who can lift

1. *Mohammad and Rise of Islam*, New York (1906), p. 1
2. Published from London in 1869;

the veil of the thirty years that prepared the way for the three? What we do know indeed has renovated a third of the world, and may yet renovate much more; an ideal of life at once remote and near; possible and impossible, but how much we do not know! What do we know of His mother, of His home life, of His early friends, of His relation to them, of the gradual dawning, or, it may be, the sudden revelation, of His divine mission? How many questions about Him occur to each of us which must always remain questions?

"But in Mohammadanism everything is different; here instead of shadowy and the mysterious we have history. We know as much of Muhammad as we do even of Luther and Milton. The mythical, the legendary, the supernatural is almost wanting in the original Arab authorities, or at all events can easily be distinguished from what is historical. Nobody here is the dupe of himself or of others; there is the full light of day upon all that that light can ever reach at all."[1]

The Muslims have written innumerable biographies of their Prophet, and are still writing more of them. It would be no exaggeration to claim that each one of these is more detailed, more reliable and based on more authentic historical records than that of any other prophet or founder of religion written by his followers. This is a continuing process:- each generation has studied afresh the original sources, traditions and ear-and-eye-witness reports, shed fresh light on the Prophet's life, and, passed on the fruits of its labour to the succeeding generation. *Muwatta*, the first compilation of traditions was learnt by 400 persons from its author, Mālik b. Anas, and his disciples included rulers as well as scholars, legists as well as litterateurs. Sixty thousand persons had attended the discourses of Al-Firabrī, lecturing on the *Sahīh* of his mentor,

1. Muhammad and Muhammadanism, pp. 16/18

Al-Bukhārī. Were similar arrangements ever made for propagating the teachings and biographical data of any other founder of religion? Was the biography of any other prophet transmitted, preserved and compiled with the same care? Who can claim this honour save Muhammad—on whom be peace and blessings of the Lord!

FOUR

PERFECTION

Perfection is the test of an ideal life. Historicity of any character is, however, not the criterion of perfection, although it is absolutely essential to have solid and complete knowledge about the life and conduct of a perfect guide and an ideal mentor.

The life of Muhammad, from his birth to death, is before us like an open book. His companions knew him in full and they also took care to transmit whatever they knew about him to the posterity. There was never a span of time, howsoever small, that the Prophet had spent in seclusion, away from the gaze of his contemporaries. We know about his birth and childhood, his boyhood and youth, his trade and commerce, his behaviour with his friends, his marriage, his participation in the battle of the Quraish and the treaty thereafter, his earning the title of 'trustworthy', installation of the black stone of Kʿabā by him, his meditations and prayers in the cave of Hira, the coming of revelations, birth of Islam, his preachings and opposition by the Meccans, his wanderings in Tā'if, his ascension to the Heaven and migration to Madina, his incursions and battles, the treaty of Hudaybia concluded by him, his epistles to the kings and rulers of surrounding countries, his farewell pilgrimage, the

completion of revelation and his death, in short, there is nothing of his life that is not known to the world. All of it was put into writing : even what was known to be ambiguous was also preserved by his followers so that the coming generations might themselves be able to decide what was acceptable or not. One might ask: "Why were the traditions known to be weak or untrustworthy preserved at all by the early traditionists? What was the wisdom behind it?" Really, it was not without purpose, for they did not want to be accused of suppressing unfavourable reports about their Prophet—a criticism pertinently applied to the Christian Gospels. This was the proof of their genuine candour and faith in the strength of their Prophet's character.

The traditions do not hide anything about the Prophet. The manner of his speaking, sitting, lying, sleeping, dressing and walking ; his marriages, wives, children, friends and followers ; his engagements in camps and cantonments ; his prayers in the mosque and command of armies in the battlefields ; his habits, likes and dislikes ; even his dealings with his wives in privacy—everything can be found here as plain as day. To be more exact, let us quote here the headings of the chapters of the *Shamā'il* of Muhammad b. ʿIsā Tirmidhī, a book on the appearance, habits and character of the Prophet.

Chapter 1. Prophet's appearance and features.
Chapter 2. His hair.
Chapter 3. His combs.
Chapter 4. His grey hairs.
Chapter 5. His hair-dye.
Chapter 6. His use of Collyrium.
Chapter 7. His dress.
Chapter 8. His daily routine.
Chapter 9. His stockings.
Chapter 10. His shoes.
Chapter 11. His finger ring.
Chapter 12. His sword.

Chapter 13. His chain armour.
Chapter 14. His helmet.
Chapter 15. His turban.
Chapter 16. His pair of trousers.
Chapter 17. His gait.
Chapter 18. His covering of the face with cloth.
Chapter 19. The manner of his sitting.
Chapter 20. His bedding and pillow.
Chapter 21. His reclining against the pillow.
Chapter 22. His habits in eating.
Chapter 23. His manner of taking bread.
Chapter 24. His manner of taking soup and meat.
Chapter 25. His way of ablution.
Chapter 26. His invocations before and after taking meals.
Chapter 27. His bowls and cups.
Chapter 28. Fruits taken by him.
Chapter 29. On his drinks.
Chapter 30. How he drank?
Chapter 31. His use of perfumes.
Chapter 32. His way of talking.
Chapter 33. His manner of reciting verses.
Chapter 34. His narration of stories.
Chapter 35. His way of sleeping.
Chapter 36. His way of praying.
Chapter 37. His way of smiling.
Chapter 38. His wit and humour.
Chapter 39. His morning prayers.
Chapter 40. His voluntary prayers at home.
Chapter 41. His fasts.
Chapter 42. His recital of the Qur'an.
Chapter 43. His lamentations at prayer.
Chapter 44. His beddings.
Chapter 45. His hospitality.
Chapter 46. His politeness.
Chapter 47. Trimmings of his hair.

Chapter 48. His names.
Chapter 49. His mode of living.
Chapter 50. His age.
Chapter 51. His death.
Chapter 52. His bequest.

These are the topics discussed, briefly or in detail, describing every aspect of his life. Whether he was in the midst of his wives and children, or among his friends and followers, every moment of his life was reported and recorded.

Even the greatest of men are commoners in their own houses. That is why Voltaire once remarked that "no man is a hero to his valet." But Voltaire's dictum was reversed, says Bosworth Smith, at least in the case of Muhammad. A historian like Edward Gibbon avouches that "the first and the most arduous conquests of Māhomet were those of his wife, his servant, his pupil and his friend; since he presented himself as a prophet to those who were most conversant with his infirmities as a man."[1] With enthusiasm they all yielded to the voice of prophecy.

It cannot be gainsaid that nobody can be more aware of the weaknesses of a man than his own wife. And, is it not a fact that the first who believed in the mission of Muhammad was Khadīja, his own wife, who had been his companion for the last fifteen years? Was she not expected to know him inside out, but no sooner than did he make the claim to apostleship that she confirmed the veracity of his message.

But, this is not all. No man, howsoever great or truthful, can allow his wife to tell others everything she knows about him. Nobody can take this risk even if he has only one wife. The Prophet, however, had nine wives, and he had permitted all of them to tell everyone whatever they saw of him doing

1. *The Decline and Fall of Roman Empire*, Vol. V, p. 351-52

in the light of the day or the darkness of the night. He had definitely asked them not to keep anything secret about him. Is there even one example of a similar self-confidence and moral courage exhibited by any man in any age ?

All the books on traditions speak eloquently about the fine virtues and high morals of the Prophet. However, of these one that deserves to be specially mentioned here is the *Kitāb-us-Shifā* of Qādī ʿAyāz Andalūsī. An European orientalist once told me, during my visit to France, that it would be sufficient to render Qādī ʿAyāz's *As-Shifā* in one of the European languages for acquainting the Westerners with the moral virtues of the holy Prophet. Of a fact the information available today about the character and morals of the Prophet can be gauged from the sub-headings of the chapter on 'Character' of the Prophet, in my own book entitled '*Sīrat-un-Nabī*'. These are : His countenance, the Seal of Prophethood,[1] his hair, gait, speech, smile and laughter, dress, finger-ring, chain-armour and helmet, the food relished by him and his manner of eating, his habits in eating, his liking for good dress, colours preferred and disliked by him, the perfumes used by him, his refined taste and fondness for riding.

The section dealing with the Prophet's daily routine covers his pursuits from morn till eve : sleep, prayer at night, habits in prayers, sermons, travels and holy wars, manner of consoling others, cordiality and general pursuits.

In regard to his assemblies the details given are about the conclave of the Prophet, his sermon sessions, etiquette of the meetings, their timings, special gatherings of women, way of address, liveliness of pronouncements, influence on participants, manner of expression, nature and content of speeches and their effectiveness.

The captions dealing with the Prophet's worship are

1. A large mole on the Prophet's back which is said to have been a divine sign of his prophetic office.

supplications, orison, fasting, poor-due, charity, pilgrimage, remembrance of God, ardour for the Lord's companionship, prayers in the battlefield, awe of God, lamentations, love of God, reliance on God, endurance and thanksgiving.

The moral virtues of the Prophet have been explained with the details about his character, perseverance, politeness, fair dealing, justice, generosity, selflessness, hospitality, aversion to begging and refusal to take alms, acceptance of presents, avoidance of obligations by others, non-violence, dislike for the show of piety, disdain of flattery and fault-finding, simplicity, distaste for riches and ostentation, sense of equality, dislike for undue veneration and approbation, sense of modesty, doing of his work himself, fortitude, forbearance and forgiveness, pardoning of the pagans and enemies, kindliness to unbelievers, treatment to the Jews and Christians, affection for the poor, prayers for the welfare of his foes, love for children, courtesy to women, kindness to animals, affection and mercifulness, kindheartedness, nursing the sick and consoling the bereaved, wit and humour, affection for his own children and treatment of his wives.

Hāfiz Ibn Qayyim has given in the *Zād-al-Maʿād* even additional details about the personal bearing and deportment of the Prophet, such as, his communications and correspondence, his marital life, his manner of sleeping and getting up, his way of riding, his manner of accepting slaves for his service, his dealings in sales and purchases, how he satisfied his physical needs, his growing and cropping of moustaches, his manner of speaking and keeping silence, lamenting and laughing, how he delivered his sermons, how he performed ablution, *masah* and *tayammum*, the way he offered prayers, performed prostrations and ended the prayers, his prayers in the mosque and at home, his vigils and orisons in the night, his manner of performing funeral prayers, his recitation of the Qurʾān, his charities, his fasts at home and in travels and the fasts in the month

of Ramadhān and on other days, his meditations and way of performing pilgrimage, his offering of oblations, his performance of Friday prayers, how he performed the rite of *'aqīqa* of new born babies as also naming and circumcision of children, the way he entered a house after seeking permission, his invocations before and after meals and on sighting the new moon, how he saluted and invoked blessings on others, the way he set off for travels, his method of solemnising marriages, his dislike for harsh language, how he treated the captives, spies and hypocrites, his dealings with the followers of revealed religions and unbelievers and his method of treating certain ailments.

The list of subjects treated by the authors, some of which have been cited here, are merely illustrative of the details available about the life and character, conduct and behaviour of the Prophet of Islam. They show how meticulously every incident, great or small, important or insignificant relating to the Prophet's life has been preserved, leaving nothing more to be desired. These details also show, by the same token, what the perfection of any character really means and how the Prophet of Islam stands apart from all other founders of religions in having a complete and exhaustive record of every aspect of his life and character preserved for the benefit of posterity.

It is no less significant that the Prophet of Islam had given definite instructions to his followers that whatever they saw of him, saying or doing, amongst them or alone, in the mosque or in the battlefield, leading the prayers or conducting wars, on the pulpit or in a closet, should invariably be brought to the notice of others. His wives, as a consequence, freely talked about his private affairs while seventy of his followers lived close to his house in his mosque to learn all about him. These companions earned their living by selling fire-wood collected from the forest or similar other trades, but they had arranged between

themselves to leave a party always in attendance of the Prophet so that nothing escaped their attention. One out of these seventy was Abū Huraira who is credited with the transmission of the largest number of traditions or reports about the Prophet. There were also the inhabitants of Madina besides these seventy companions, who attended congregational prayers led by the Prophet, five times a day, for ten long years. All of them had the opportunity of observing his actions, habits and customs. Then, there were occasions when even larger numbers gathered round the Prophet. In the expedition for the capture of Mecca, ten thousand Muslims accompanied the Prophet while their number was thirty thousand in the battle of Tabūk and one hundred thousand during the Farewell Pilgrimage. Everybody knew that it was a bounden duty lying upon him to tell others whatever he came to know about the Messenger of God. Nothing about his life from the closet of his sleeping chamber to the market place, thus, ever ramained a secret, and everything of it was handed down from generation to generation. But, all this abundance of reports about him notwithstanding, even his most inveterate enemies could never bring up any charge against him except polygamy and the holy wars waged by him. Which will you call a spotless and virtuous life—that of Muhammad, the Prophet, or the life of those already shrouded in mystery?

One more aspect of Muhammad's life needs attention. He was not always surrounded by his devoted followers. He spent the first forty years of his life with the Quraish in Mecca. He had his business dealings with them which is a sure test of one's honesty and trustworthiness. How he acquitted himself in these transactions, when he was still a youth, is illustrated by the fact that he won the title of the *Amin* or Trustworthy from the Meccans. Even after he was favoured with the revelation from on High, those who opposed his claim to prophethood had such a trust in his

honesty that they entrusted their valuables to his safe keeping. It is a well known fact that the Prophet had to leave behind ʿAlī, on the occasion of his migration to Madina, for returning several of these goods to their owners. The whole of Mecca had stood up against the Prophet, boycotted and heaped invectives upon him, thrown rubbish and stones on him, made plans to kill him and accused him of being an enchanter and a poet and a lunatic, but none ever dared bring his character and morals in question. Does not the claim to divine apostleship mean a claim to innocence and unblemished character ? Would have not a few instances of his immoral behaviour been sufficient to refute his claim to prophethood ? Why was it that the Quraish spent their wealth and put their own lives at stake but they never framed any charge to blemish his character? Does this not prove that the Prophet was as much above reproach in the eyes of his foes as he was to his followers ?

Once all the leading men of the Quraish had assembled to talk about the problem posed by the Prophet's defiance of pagan gods. Al-Nādr b. al-Hārith, the more experienced among them, got up and said : "O Quraish, a situation has arisen which you cannot deal with. Muhammad was a young man most liked amongst you, most truthful in speech and most trustworthy, until, when you saw grey hairs on his temple, and he brought you a message, you said he was a sorcerer, a diviner, a poet and was possessed, but by God, there is nothing of this sort in Muhammad for I have heard him speaking and preaching."[1]

None was a greater enemy of the Prophet than Abū Jahl, but he once said to him : "Muhammad, I do not call you a liar, but I do not think that whatever you preach is correct." It was on this occasion that the revelation came—

"We Know well how their talk grieveth thee, though in truth they deny not thee (Muhammad), but evil-doers

1. *Ibn Hishām*, p. 191.

flout the revelations of Allah."[1]

When the Prophet was commanded to announce the truth he had received, he climbed the top of a hill and called out the Quraish. After they had all gathered round him, he asked them: "What would you think, if I were to tell you that the enemy is lying in ambush behind this hillock to attack you?" The reply he received was, "Oh Yes. For we have never heard you speaking a lie."[2]

After the envoy of the Prophet had delivered his message to the Byzantine Emperor, Heraclius, the latter called for Abū Sufyān, a sworn enemy of the Prophet, who had been arraying his forces against him for the last six years, for making enquiries about the man who had dared to address him. An enemy was thus called to avouch for his bitterest foe whom he wanted to destroy at any cost. Abū Sufyān also knew that if he could somehow provoke the passions of the powerful Emperor against his adversary, the Roman legions could devastate Madina in a couple of days. But this was the conversation that passed on between the two.

Heraclius first demanded: "Tell me about his lineage amongst you."

"It is pure", replied Abū Sufyān, "our best lineage."

"Has any of his house made the same claim earlier?" asked Heraclius again.

"No." replied Abū Sufyān.

Heraclius now demanded again, "Did anybody possess sovereignty in his family?"

Abū Sufyān had again to say "No" in reply.

Now Heraclius put another question: "What sort of men are those who have accepted his religion? Are they poor or influential people?"

"Weak and helpless", replied Abū Sufyān.

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1. Q. VI: 33
2. *Tirmidhī, Tafsīr Surah al-Anʿām*

Heraclius asked again, "Is the number of his followers increasing or decreasing?"

"Increasing", Abū Sufyān had to acknowledge in reply.

"Has he ever told you a lie?", demanded the Emperor.

Abū Sufyān again replied in the negative and then Heraclius enquired, "Has he ever been treacherous?"

"No", said Abū Sufyān in reply, but added, "But we will see what he does in future".

"And what does he teach you" was the last question asked by Heraclius.

"He asks us", replied Abū Sufyān, "to worship only One God, to offer prayers, to become virtuous, to speak the truth and to discharge our obligations to the kinsmen."[1]

Does Muhammad need any more proof in support of the perfection of his character? Was such a conclusive evidence ever produced for anyone by one's enemy?

But, there is something more about Muhammad that catches the eye. Those who first found credence in the call of Muhammad were neither the fishermen of a subject race nor the despised slaves of a Pharaoh: they belonged to a free and proud race, never subjected to alien rule in their memory. Known for their pragmatism, they were the people who had commercial dealings with Iran, Syria and Asia Minor. They have left their marks, still visible today, as a keen, intelligent and sagacious people. They produced military generals comparable to the greatest of conquerors, fought valiantly against forces many times their numbers and acquitted themselves well as rulers of vast and populous lands. Can anybody feign that the men who had proved the strength of their arms and intellect had remained ignorant of the true character of their own guide and teacher? Was it ever possible to dupe such a people? Rather, they were the people who followed in the footsteps of their mentor with the greatest enthusiasm and took every possible step

1. Ibn Is'hāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 655

to preserve the memory of their beloved master. This is, of a fact, an incontrovertible sign of the perfection of Muhammad's character.

The Prophet never tried to hide anything about him. He was known to all as he was. His wife 'Āyesha, who had been his closest companion for nine years, relates: "Never believe one who says that Muhammad had suppressed any commandment of God, for God Himself attests: "The duty of the messenger is only to convey (the message). Allah knoweth what ye proclaim and what ye hide."[1]

Nobody ever wants to reveal his weaknesses—and spiritual and moral preceptors, the least of all. Still, the Qur'ān has several verses admonishing the Prophet on his apparent mistakes. Each of these verses was read out to others by him, memorised by the people and has ever since been recited in the mosques and the homes. Had these verses not alluded to the Prophet's mistakes, the world would have never come to know at least some of them. But these were pointed out by God, for this was the character to be presented in the full light of day as the prototype of all human perfection.

The marriage of the Prophet with the divorced wife of his adopted son was an act detestable to the Arabs. Yet the incident has been described at length in the Qur'ān. 'Āyesha says that if the Prophet had the option to suppress any verse of the Qur'ān, he would certainly have not divulged these to avoid criticism.[2] The very fact that the Prophet gave out even these verses testifies that nothing about his life and character remains in the dark.

It may be useful to recall here the attestation of Bosworth Smith, who writes:

"There is full light of day upon all that that light

1. *Al-Sahih, Tafsir Sūratul Mā'ida* (V : 99)
2. *Al-Musnad*, VI, p. 233

can ever reach at all. 'The abysmal depths of personality' indeed are, and must always remain, beyond the reach of any line and plummet of ours. But we know everything of the external history of Muhammad—his youth, his appearance, his relations, his habits; the first idea and the gradual growth, intermittent though it was, of his great revelation; while for his internal history, after his mission had been proclaimed, we have a book absolutely unique in its origin, in its preservation, and in the chaos of its contents, but on the substantial authenticity of which no one has ever been able to cast a serious doubt. There, if in any book, we have a mirror of one of the master-spirits of the world; often inartistic, incoherent, self-contradictory, dull, but impregnated with a few grand ideas wl ich stand out from the whole; a mind seething with the inspiration pent within it, 'intoxicated with God', but full of human weaknesses, from which he never pretended—and it is his lasting glory that he never pretended—to be free."[1]

Bosworth Smith further goes on to say:

"It has been remarked by Gibbon that no incipient Prophet ever passed through so severe an ordeal as Muhammad, since he first presented himself as a Prophet to those who were most conversant with his infirmities as a man. Those who knew him best, his wife, his eccentric slave, his cousin, his earliest friend—he, who, as Muhammad said, alone of his converts, 'turned not back, neither was perplexed'—were the first to recognise his mission. The ordinary lot of a Prophet was in his case reversed; he was not without honour save among those who did not know him well."[2]

The more intimately one knew the Prophet, the more one admired him. The men who first placed trust in the

1. *Mohammad and Mohammadanism*, pp. 17/18
2. *Ibid.*, p. 127

mission of prophets before Muhammad were those who knew least about them, and their friends and relations were the last to follow them. But the case was entirely different with Muhammad. He first won the allegiance of those who were closest to him, knew him intimately and had a personal experience of his dealings, conduct and behaviour. What is more, all of them had to pass through a gruelling test as well. Khadījā, the Prophet's wife, had to endure the rigours of a boycott imposed by the Meccans for three long years when she had to live in the Shuyʿeb Abī Tālib. Abū Bakr had to accompany his mentor when the enemy thirsting for his blood, was looking into every nook and corner to lay his hands on the Prophet. ʿAlī had to sleep on the bed whose owner had been earmarked for assassination in the same night. Zaid was emancipated by his master, but he would rather prefer to live with his former owner than return home with his father.

Paying a tribute to the earnestness of the Prophet's companions Godfrey Haggins says that the Christians would do well to recollect that the doctrines of Muhammad created a degree of enthusiasm in his followers which is to be sought in vain in the immediate followers of Jesus.... when Jesus was led to the Cross, his followers fled, their enthusiasm forsook them, they left him to perish....The followers of Muhammad, on the contrary, rallied round their persecuted prophet, and, risking their lives in his defence, made him triumph over all his enemies.[1]

The Apostle of God was hemmed in from all sides by the enemy in the battle of Uhad. He called out: "Who will barter his life for me?" No sooner than did his followers hear the summon that seven of the Ansārs rushed to defend the Prophet and fought, man after man, and died like heroes.[2] An Ansārī woman lost her father, brother

1. *An Apology for the Life of Mohammad.*
2. Ibn Is'hāq (*The Life of Muhammad*) pp. 380-81

and husband in the same battle. She heard about the death of her nearest kins, one by one, but unmindful of her loss she continued to enquire: "Is the Prophet of God alright?" At last she was told that the Prophet was alive; but not content with the news, she came herself to see the Prophet and exclaimed: "No calamity shall befall us so long thou art alive."

> My father, my husband, my brother and I myself,
> All can be put at stake, my lord, for thy sake.

This was the love felt all too deeply by those who knew the Prophet intimately. Would it be possible for anyone to sacrifice his life for another man unless he considers him a perfect model of cardinal virtues? This is the reason why Islam presents the life of Muhammad as a perfect model and an exemplar for the entire humanity and calls upon us to love him if we want to be loved by God.

> "Say, (O Muhammad to mankind): If ye love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you."[1]

To follow the Prophet is, then, the test of one's love for God. It is easy to burn oneself in a moment like a moth, but it is extremely difficult to follow in the footsteps of a guide assiduously until one's hour is come. It was a very severe ordeal, no doubt; but it was passed through with flying colours by every companion of the Prophet. This had become the goal of their lives: an ideal which made the Prophet's companions and their disciples assume the role of biographers, chroniclers and historians. They made it a great task of their lives to find out each and everything about their beloved Prophet and preserve it for the coming generations. This, in itself, is a proof of the perfection of the Prophet's life and character in the eyes of his immediate successors. Nothing else would have engaged their attention so thoroughly.

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1. Q. III: 31

For Islam holds up the life of the holy Prophet as a perfect model for every Muslim, it needs must be completely known in all its aspects and details. And, the fact is that it has actually been so for the last one and a half thousand years, illuminating the path of countless believers over the ages. There is nothing in the dark, nothing missing—all that the Muslims needed to know of him for the edification of their souls was always found by them. A man whose life was so intimately known could have alone been held as a model guide, as an exemplar and as a sinless man of God by innumerable saints and savants, and hence the verdict of history also goes in his favour.

Babylon, Assyria, India, China, Egypt, Palestine and Greece have been the cradles of ancient civilisations. Ethical norms were set up by the great philosophers of these countries, rules and conventions were evolved for eating and drinking, food and dress, marriages and deaths, festivals and bereavements. These were elaborated over hundreds of years, but destroyed in no time. Islam formulated the principles of its civilisation in a couple of years, yet they continue to rule over the nations for thousands of years. They were found equally useful by all because they emanated from a single source—the life of the holy Prophet. This was the model which had left a profound imprint upon the companions, patterned their lives and set the model for their successors, thus, making it the ideal way of life for the whole Islamic world. The sacred life of the Prophet was the nucleus round which revolved the lives of his companions and subsequent generations. It was made a full circle by the peoples of different stocks joining in the perambulation. The civilisation thus reared by the genius of different Muslim nationalities may differ to some extent and may also have some shortcomings, but the soul which runs through it is one, complete and wholesome. Wherever there may be Muslims, they would derive inspiration from the same gold mine. Let me illustrate it by an example.

Whenever any savage of the dark continent or even a civilised person living in India embraces Christianity, he is taught to imitate the culture of the materialistic West although he takes his spiritual lessons from the Gospels. But, whatever may be the stage of development of any nation accepting Islam, it has to look to the same shining example for religion as well as culture, for morals as well as customs. The moment one enters the fold of Islam, one finds the life of the Prophet before him, pointing the way to be followed in different situations and circumstances. It is a living example, a mirror reflecting all the conditions and complexions of human life.

A Jew, who wanted to find fault with the Muslims, once said to a companion of the Prophet, "Your Prophet teaches you everything, even trifling matters ?" "Yes", came the prompt reply, "Our Prophet teaches us even about abstersion after urination and excretion." The Muslims are still proud of this noblest exemplar for all human beings : he is the heaven's gift, a standard by which every man can reform and renovate his life and morals, body and spirit, behaviour and conduct and habits and manners. The people having faith in Islam need nothing beyond the standard set by the Prophet for their cultural, moral and social progress. The Prophet's life is the universal touchstone : it draws a distinction between the vice and the virtue, the good and the bad. For the world lacks another exemplar like the Prophet : he alone is the perfect model for the whole world. May God have peace and mercy on him.

FIVE

COMPREHENSIVENESS

"Say (O Muhammad to mankind) : If ye love Allah, follow me : Allah will love you."

(Q. III : 31)

A cardinal principle of religion is to love God and make oneself worthy of the love and mercy of God. And, to achieve this great purpose, almost every religion teaches its votaries to follow the way shown by its founder. Islam, however, raises the whole level of religious thought and action by placing the scripture, or the *Kitāb*, as well as the paradigm of its Prophet, or his *sunnah*, before the believers for their guidance. The *Kitāb* stands for divine commandments revealed to show the Will of God while the *sunnah* is the practical illustration furnished by the Prophet's life spent in conformity with that Will. The practice of the Prophet is contained in its fulness in the traditions, or the *ahādīth*, in order to direct and guide the seeker after truth on the path of religion to a deep and real-spiritual experience.

No religion can have all of its followers belonging to the same class or profession. Divergence of views and leanings and differences in professions and callings are the compelling needs of our earthly life. The world has to have kings and rulers as well as serfs and subjects ; the judges

and the jurists for the administration of the law and commanders of armies for maintaining security of the realm ; the poor and the rich, the mendicants and the warriors, the businessmen and the priests for keeping the wheels of life moving onwards. Everyone of these needs an exemplar who may show the right path to him in his own sphere of life. But, Islam invites all of them to follow the example of its Prophet. This, in other words, means that the life presented by it as a model for all of them has a precedent for every class and a practical example of ideal life in every field of diverse callings. The claim, by itself, illustrates, the comprehensiveness of its model asked to be followed by all. For no affluent person can set an example to be followed by the poor, nor the poor for the rich, nor the ruler for the ruled, nor yet the ruled for the ruler, it was necessary to have a universal model, a comprehensive and abiding exemplar like a bouquet containing flowers of every tint and hue.

Apart from the diversity of classes and callings, the life of man consists of a wide range of moods and inclinations governing his actions in different situations and circumstances. We walk and sit, we eat and sleep, we laugh and weep, we give and take, we kill and get killed, in short, we act in different ways on different occasions. Sometimes we pay homage to God, at others we engage in our business ; we are often guests or act as hosts ; and, for all these occasions we need a precedent to know the correct way of behaviour suited for that occasion.

Besides the actions involving physical exertions, there are also those which relate to the head and heart of man and which we call sentiments. Our sentiments or impulsions are ever-changing ; often we are pleased and at times we get angry and agitated ; feelings of hope and dejection, of pleasure and affliction and of success and failure are different states of mind which alternately take hold of us and influence our actions. The moderateness of these

emotions holds the key to the best and correct behaviour in all circumstances. Therefore, we need a model of practical morality who can show us how to exercise control over our inborn tendencies of extremism and excess. We require a practical model to discipline our emotions and feelings, and such was the emblem of moderation who once lived in the city of Madina.

We have to be resolute, unwavering, courageous, patient, resigned, self-sacrificing, benevolent and merciful according to different situations of life that we come across on different occasions. We need a practical example to regulate our behaviour in each of these varied conditions. But, where are we to look for them except in Muhammad? In Moses we can see an intrepid leader but not a merciful preceptor; Jesus of Nazareth can be a model of leniency and kindliness, but he lacks the ardour that warms the blood of the weak and poor. Man needs both of these and has also to learn how to keep a correct balance between the two. He can find both these qualities perfectly tempered in a harmonious manner in the life of the Prophet of Islam.

A model which can serve as a standard for every class of the people acting under different circumstances and states of human emotions will be found in the life of Muhammad. If you are rich, there is the example of the tradesman of Mecca and the master of Bahrain's treasures; if you are poor, you can follow the internee of Shuʿyeb Abī Tālib and the emigree of Madina; if you are a king, watch the actions of the ruler of Arabia; if you are a vassal, look at the man enduring hardships imposed by the Quraish of Mecca; if you are a conqueror, look at the victor of Badr and Hunayn; if you have suffered a defeat, take a lesson from the one discomfited at Uhad; if you are a teacher, learn from the holy mentor of the school of Suffah; if you are a student, look at the learner who sat before Gabriel; if you are a sermoner, direct your eyes to the discourser

delivering sermons in the mosque at Madina; if you are charged to preach the gospel of truth and mercy to your persecutors, observe the helpless preacher explaining the message of God to the pagans of Mecca; if you have brought your enemy to his knees, look at the conqueror of Mecca; if you want to administer your lands and properties, discover how the lands and groves of Banī al-Nadīr, Khaībar and Fadak were managed; if you are an orphan, do not forget the child of Amīna and ʿAbd Allāh left to the tender mercy of Halīma; if you are young, see the character of Mecca's shepherd; if you have a travelling business, cast a glance at the leader of caravan under way to Basra; if you are a judge or arbiter, look at the umpire entering the holy sanctuary before the peep of the dawn and installing Hajr-ul-Aswad in the Kaʿaba, or the justice of peace in whose eyes the poor and the rich were alike; if you are a husband, study the behaviour of the husband of Kadīja and ʿĀyesha; if you are a father, go through the biography of Fātima's father and grandfather of Hassan and Husain; in short, whoever and whatever you may be, you would find a shining example in the life of the holy Prophet to illuminate your behaviour." He is the only beacon of light and guidance for every seeker after truth. If you have the life of the Prophet of Islam before you, you can find the examples of all the prophets, Noah and Abrāham, Job and Jonah and Moses and Jesus. If the life and character of each prophet of God were deemed to be a shop selling the wares of one commodity, that of Muhammad would verily be a variety store where goods of every description can be had to suit the tastes and needs of all.

My friend, Hasan ʿAlī, used to bring out a magazine named *Nūr-i-Islām* from Patna some thirty or forty years back. Once he had published in his journal the views of a Hindu friend of his about Muhammad. In answer to the question why he held the Prophet of Islam to be the greatest

and the most perfect of men ever born in the world and what opinion he held about Jesus, this learned friend of Hasan 'Alī had replied that Jesus, in comparison to Muhammad, appeared to be an innocent child, articulating sweet words before a man of wisdom. Asked to elucidate the reason for considering Muhammad to be the greatest man, he had replied: "I find in his character such diverse and manifold qualities as it would be impossible to find in any other man whose biography has been preserved by history. He is a king having a whole country under his control but never claiming mastery over even his own self; ever taking pride in his being the serf of God. He is the master of camel-loads of treasure getting into his capital from far and near, yet he is ever so poor that for months no fire is lighted in his own hearth, and he goes without a full meal for days together. Like a veteran campaigner he can defeat his enemies, fully armed and exceeding his none too well armed battlers, still he is so peace-loving that he has no hesitation in signing a treaty when thousands of his followers are ready to fight till death. He is a man so dauntless that he can set the whole of the Quraish at defiance, but is also so kindhearted that he never sheds a drop of blood. He is solicitous of the welfare of his own family, of the weak and the orphan, and of every wayward soul in Arabia; he is always care-worn about the salvation of every human being; but he is also indifferent to everything save the pleasure of his Lord. He never curses those who deride him, nor does he retaliate against those who persecute him; rather, he invokes divine blessings on those who bear malice against him; nevertheless, he never forgives the enemies of God whom he always threatens with grievous punishment in the hereafter. When we begin to see him as a militant battler, he appears before us as an ascetic in vigils and prayers and when we find him making his debut as a brilliant conqueror, we are astonished to see in him the innocent divine messenger. Just when we want to

call him the King of Arabia, we find him leaning on a leather pillow filled with date-leaves. The day we see the booty of war piled up in the courtyard of his Mosque, we find his own family with absolutely nothing to satisfy the pangs of hunger. When we see him distributing the prisoners of war as serfs to the inhabitants of Madina, we also see his daughter Fātima complaining of blisters on her hands and shoulders caused by driving the handmill and carrying water. After the half of Arabia submits to his authority, ʿUmar finds him lying on a rough mattress whose weavings have left their marks on his bare body. His house then contains nothing except a handful of oats and a leather jar. His frugal living makes ʿUmar burst into tears, who says: "O Apostle of God, is it not distressing to see the Qaisars[1] and the Kisrās[2] rejoicing in the luxuries of the world while the Messenger of God has to live with these straitened means?" But he gets the reply: "ʿUmar, would you not like that the Qaisar and the Kisrā should choose this world and I the next?"

On the day Mecca fell to the arms of the Prophet, Abū Sufyān, the Chief of Mecca and the greatest enemy of Islam till recently, stood watching the stepping-in Muslim troops, waves after waves, with their tribal colours flying over their heads. Abū Sufyān got overawed and said to ʿAbbās standing beside him: "ʿAbbās, your nephew has risen to be a great King!" "No", replied ʿAbbās, "not a king but a Prophet."

ʿAdī, the son of Hātim, the famous chief of the tribe of Tay, was still a Christian when he called upon the Prophet in Mádina for the second time. He saw, on the one hand, the deference paid to the Prophet by his devoted companions and, on the other, the preparations being made for the holy war. Unable to decide whether Muhammad was a

1. Caesars, the emperors of Byzantium
2. Chosroes, the emperors of Iran

prophet or a king, he was still in two minds when he saw a slave girl coming to seek the Prophet's advice in private. "Come on", he heard the Prophet replying, "I'll go wherever you want." ʻAdī at once saw that no king could be so modest and unassuming. He threw away the cross hanging from his neck and embraced Islam.

The instances just related are not mere fictions but actual facts. Only a character so comprehensive, so sweeping as to encompass the present and the future, the east and the west and all the diverse situations of human life can provide light and guidance to all classes and groups of human beings. A great teacher is he who can illustrate right behaviour in the fit of anger as well as on occasions demanding merciful charity; who can tell us how to be generous in adversity and brave and courageous in the state of helplessness; who can provide us with a practical example of being a man of the world as well as God-fearing; and, who can give us the glad tidings of both the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of Earth at one and the same time.

There may be people who might hold forgiveness and kindliness to be the greatest of virtues. These two, in their opinion, are enough to attain the perfection of spirit; but can anybody assert that man has no other moral affection, feeling and emotion? Do not emotions like anger, charity, love, hatred, greed, contentment, retaliation and forbearance play any part in shaping human behaviour? He alone can claim to be a perfect guide who can tell us how to keep a happy mean between all these natural propensities. If anybody still persists that sublimity of prophetic character consists merely of kindliness, charity and forgiveness, let him also tell the world how long the followers of such a prophet were able to follow the example of their mentor? Innumerable Christian kings have wielded the sceptre from Constantine to this day, but why could nobody ever enforce the teachings of his Saviour as the law of the land? How

can, then, the conduct of a prophet not followed by his own followers be recognised as a perfect norm to be followed by others?

Every prophet of God came to guide us with some distinguishing feature of his own. Noah's life presents the picture of righteous indignation against heathenism while Abraham is the iconoclasm's fugleman. Moses is the matrix of war, government and legislation; Jesus is the specimen of humility and charity, forgiveness and contentment; Solomon is the symbol of royal splendour; Jonah is an illustration of penitence and contrition; Joseph displays the zeal for preaching the truth even in the dungeon; David's Psalms sing of lamentation and God's glorification; Jacob is the mirror of absolute reliance and resignation to the Will of God; but, all these characteristics have been rolled into one perfect model for the entire humanity in the life and character of Muhammad. A tradition, although not very authentic, related by Khatib Baghdādī says that when Muhammad was born a celestial voice was heard commanding the angels: "Take Muhammad from one land to another and to the depth of the ocean so that the whole world, every man and jinnee, every beast and bird and every sentient being may know his name and fame. Give him the morals of Adam, gnosis of Seth, courage of Noah, faithfulness of Abraham, eloquence of Ishmael, resignation of Isaac, oratory of Sālih, wisdom of Lot, perseverance of Moses, endurance of Job, obedience of Jonah, fighting spirit of Joshua, melody of David, love of Danial, esteem of Elias, chastity of John and abstinence of Jesus and bathe him in the waters of their morals." The writers who have quoted this tradition intended only to emphasise the comprehensiveness of Muhammad's character. This tradition illustrates the engaging qualities granted individually to each prophet of God, but which were ultimately united in the person of the last and the most winsome amongst all of

them.

The different aspects of the Prophet's life clearly indicate the comprehensiveness of his character. If you behold the Prophet migrating from Mecca to Yathrib, your mind's eye would surely recall Moses running away from Egypt to Midian. The anchorite meditating in the cave of Hira had all the earmarks of the mendicant on Mount Sinai. The only difference between the two, if there was any, lay in the wakeful eyes of Moses and meditating mind of Muhammad; the one had fixed his gaze on the exterior while the other was concentrating on the inner core of Ultimate Reality. Mark the striking similarity between the preacher summoning the Quraish on Mount Safā and the sermonizer on the Mount of Olives. Behold the resemblance between the Commander of the faithful on the planes of Badr and Hunayn, Ahzāb and Tabūk and the Prophet leading the Israelites. The Prophet foretelling the doom of the seven Meccan chiefs had the very appearance of Moses cursing Pharaoh and his partisans who had rejected him after witnessing his miracles; but when Muhammad raised his hands to invoke blessings on his enemies at Uhad, he bore a striking resemblance to Jesus seeking prosperity of his foes. Were you to behold Muhammad acting as a judge in the Mosque at Madina or fighting the infidels, he would appear to have all the features of Moses, but when you rivet your eyes upon him engaged in night long prayers and vigils, you would have a glimpse of Jesus. If you hear him reciting the Qur'ān and glorifying the Lord, you would undoubtedly take him much the same as David singing the Psalms; if you bring to your mind his triumphant entry into Mecca, you would see him very like Solomon, and if you picture him in the confinement of Shu'yeb Abī Tālib, you would find the very image of Joseph languishing in the Egyptian prison.

Moses brought the law that binds the Israelites, David sang the praises and hymns of God and Jesus illustrated

piety and sound morality but Muhammad combined all —the law-giver, the pious worshipper and the paradigm of moral virtues. In words and letters, they all are described in the Qur'ān: in action, the character of Muhammad presents a perfect and practical example of all of them.

There is yet another aspect of Muhammad's all-embracing character. Let it be illustrated by the two types of educational institutions found nowadays; first, the specialised college imparting instruction in technical and professional courses, and, secondly, the Universities which cover all the different branches of learning. The institutions of the first category, viz. colleges for the teaching of medical sciences, engineering, commerce, agriculture, law or military science turn out specialists in only one branch, like the physicians, engineers, business executives, agricultural experts, etc. This is because the students taking admission to them are trained in only one branch of knowledge. It is, however, obvious that expertise in any one branch of knowledge, trade or calling is not adequate to meet the various needs of society which needs all the different types of specialised vocations for its progress and balanced development. Were all of us to study a particular art or science and devote ourselves to the same pursuit, the world would come to a standstill, signalling the breakdown of society. Thus, if all men were to become pious ascetics devoted to God, the human society would lose its social order instead of achieving perfection. Now let us judge the prophets by this standard.

"Wherefor ye shall know the tree by its fruits,"[1] is a too well known saying of Jesus. Likewise, the academies and their standards of education are known by their alumni. Now, if you direct your mind upon those academies whose revered teachers were the prophets of God, you would find

1. Mt. 7 : 16

normally ten or twenty learners, occasionally the number rising to seventy, or a hundred, or a thousand disciples, but never exceeding ten or twenty thousand at the most. But, when you come to the last prophetic school you would see more than a hundred thousand pupils around the great mentor. If you go further, and try to find out who the schoolmen of earlier prophets were, where they lived and what they did, what their attainments, morals and characters were and what improvement they brought about in the human society of their times, you are more likely than not to get any answer to these questions. In the case of the last Prophet, however, you will find the names and addresses, characters and achievements of all his disciples preserved in the pages of history. Likewise, all the religions lay a claim to the universality of their teachings without any barrier of nationality and country. But the claim can be accepted if it can be shown that the founders of those religions actually enlisted disciples belonging to other nations and races or they even invited those people to join their company irrespective of colour and race and language, or that a few persons belonging to an alien people responded to their call. No prophet of the Old Testament invited any people beyond the borders of Iraq, Syria and Egypt. In other words, the call of all the Israelite prophets was confined to the countries where they lived, or, to be more specific, their whole endeavour was limited to the guidance of the Children of Israel. So was the case with the ancient prophets of Arabia. Jesus Christ slammed the doors of his seminary against the face of alien races, for he unequivocally proclaimed : "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."[1] He did not even consider it "meet to take the children's bread and cast *it* to dogs,"[2] by preaching his Gospel to the non-Israelites. The great sages of

1. Mt. 15 : 24
2. Mt. 15 : 26

Hinduism would have perhaps never thought of diffusing their teachings beyond the sacred land of Aryaverta.[1] Some of the Buddhist kings, undoubtedly, sent missionaries to other countries but we do not find anything of the kind in the life of the Buddha himself.

Let us now look towards the Alma Mater of the unlettered teacher of Arabia. Who are the disciples here? They are Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿAlī, ʿUthmān, Talhā and Zubayr belonging to the Quraish of Mecca; Abū Dharr and Anas come of the Ghifārī tribe living in Tahāmah near Mecca; Abū Hurairah and Abū Tufail b. ʿAmr hail from Yemen and belong to the tribe of Aws; two more, Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī and Muʿādh b. Jabal are from another tribe of Yemen; Dammād b. Thʿalbā comes of the tribe of Azd; Banū Tamīm, another tribe, is represented by Khabbāb b. al-Aratt; Munqidh b. Habbān and Mundhir b. Āʿidh are the children of Banū ʿAbd al-Qais, a tribe of Bahrain; ʿUbayd and Jʿafar are the Chiefs of Omān; and Farwa b. ʿAmr is from Maʿān near Syria. And, who is this Negro? He is Bilāl from Abyssinia. Here are also Suhayb, the Roman; Salmān, the Persian; Fīrūz from Dailama; and Sunjit and Markabūd from Iran.

The treaty of Hudaybia, signed in 6 A.H./627 A.D. marks the beginning of an era of peace long cherished by Islam. Quraish and the Muslims agreed not to attack one another and the right of the Muslims to preach their faith was recognised by the Meccans. What was the pursuit to which the Prophet applied himself after securing peaceful conditions? He sent letters to the rulers, kings and emperors of adjoining countries inviting them to join their faith in the Unity of God. Dihya b. Khalīfā al-Kalbī took his letter to Caesar, who was Heraclius, King of Rome; ʿAbd Allāh b. Hudhāfa Sahmī went with credentials to Chosroes

1. Land of the Aryans i. e. India

of Iran; Hātib b. Abū Baltʿa to the Muqauqis, ruler of Alexandria; ʿAmr b. Umayya to Naǵūs, the King of Abyssinia; Shujāʿ b. Wahb al-Asadī to Hārith b. Abū Shimr al-Ghassānī, the lord of Syria; and Sālit b. ʿAmr to the chiefs of Yamāma.

The letters sent by the Prophet of Islam, unique in the history of religions, furnish a conclusive evidence, if one were needed, that Islām recognises no barriers in inviting humanity to its creed. It was meant, from the first day, for the whole world, for every man belonging to any family, tribe or country and speaking any language.

Let us now see if this seat of learning at Madina resembled the institutions offering only one course of study, like those of the earlier prophets, or it was like a University which turns out specialists in varied subjects fitted for different jobs and vocations. But, before we proceed further, let us have a look at the training institute of Moses. You would find here only men-at-arms and a few commanders like Joshua besides some priests and judges. Try to find out the disciples of Jesus, and you would see a few mendicants wandering in the by-lanes of Palestine. But here, in the theological seminary of Madina, you would find al-Ashʿam, the Nagūs of Abyssinia; Fârwā, the governor of Maʿān; Dhul-Kalʿā, the head of Himyr, Āmir b. Shahar, the prince of Hamadān, Firūz Dailamī and Markabūd, the governors of Yemen; and ʿUbayd and Jʿafar, the chieftains of Omān. You would also see, among the disciples of Muhammad, a number of serfs like Bilāl, Yāsir, Shuʿyeb, Khabbāb, ʿAmmār and Abū Fukayha as well as slave girls like Samīya, Labīna, Zanīrah, Nahdīya and Umm ʿAbīs rubbing their shoulders with the blue-blooded aristocracy of Arabia.

Those who graduated from this University included men of wisdom and master spirits of the age who ruled over nations and countries. They include Abū Bakr b. Abī

Quhāfa, ʿUmar b. al-Khattāb, ʿUthmān b. Affān and ʿAlī b. Abī Tālib. There was also Muʿāwiyah b. Abū Sufyān who held in his hands the reins of all the lands from Africa in the west to the borders of India in the east. They proved themselves such ideal rulers as never seen by the world before or after them: their administration threw into shade the greatest kingdoms of all times and their rules of justice eclipsed the Roman and Iranian legal systems.

This institution produced great generals like Khālid b. Walīd, Sʿad b. Abī Waqqās, Abū ʿUbayda b. Jarrāh and ʿAmr b. Abī al-ʿĀs who overthrew the two despotic empires of the east and the west in a few years. They became great conquerors whose exploits are still admired with amazement. Sʿad snatched the crowns of Iraq and Iran; Khālid and Abū ʿUbayda turned out the Byzantines from Syria, restoring the land of Abraham to its rightful owners; Amr b. al-ʿĀs swooped down upon the ancient land of Pharaoh; while ʿAbd Allāh b. Zubair and Ibn Abī Sarah swept out the enemy from North Africa. Their conquests demonstrate their military genius which has few parallels in the history of the world.

There were successful administrators and governors also among the alumni of this prophetic school. Bāzān b. Sāsān ruled over Yemen, Khālid b. Saʿīd over Sanaʿā, Muhājir b. Ummīya over Kinda, Zayad b. Walīd over Hadrmaut, ʿAmr b. Hazm over Najrān, Yazīd b. Abū Sufyān over Taīma and ʿAlā b. al-Hadramī over Bahrain besides scores of others exercising authority over populous countries.

The learners of this institute have also excelled as scholars and legists. ʿUmar b. al-Khattāb, ʿAlī b. Abī Tālib, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās, ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀs, ʿĀyesha, Umm Salma, Abī b. Kʿab, Muʿādh b. Jabal, Zaid b. Thābit and Ibn Zubayr are some of the illustrious legists who laid the foundation of Islamic jurisprudence. They can, verily, be compared with the

greatest legislators of the world.

Biographers and chroniclers are also to be seen among the inceptors of this prophetic school. Abū Huraira, Abū Mūsā Ash'arī, Anas b. Mālik, Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī, 'Ibādah b. Sāmit, Jābir b. 'Abd Allāh and Bar'ā b. 'Āzib are amongst hundreds others who narrated and recorded all the details of Islamic faith and practice as well as the events and occurrences of the life of the Prophet.

Here we also find a batch of studious learners, indifferent to every other pursuit that attracts the attention of men, having no other place to live save the Mosque of the Prophet. They are seventy in number, devoting themselves wholly to prayers and orisons and learning all about the faith from the great teacher.

This does not, in any case, exhaust the list of the students of this institute, nor their achievements. There is Abū Dharr, a man so truthful that the world would have hardly seen one like him. Disregardful of the world and all that it stands for, he never keeps with him provisions for the morrow. He gets the title of the Christ of Islam from his mentor for his truthfulness and piety. Salmān, the Persian, is another disciple, who is the very picture of piety and devotion. Yet another pious soul, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar can also be seen here who spends thirty years of his life in the service of his faith, but when he is asked to take the reins of the then world's largest empire in his hands, he gives his consent on the condition that he will abdicate if even a drop of Muslims' blood is shed during his regime. Mus'ab b. 'Umayr was the smart chic, always dressed in silk and brocade, but after he accepted Islam he was ever seen in patched garments of coarse cloth. When he dies he has not a cloak long enough to cover him from head to foot and his foot has to be covered with grass! There is also 'Uthmān b. Maz'ūn, a mystic of pre-Islamic days. Muhammad b. Salamah is yet another disciple who declares : "Were a Muslim to enter my room to kill me, I would not attack

him." Here is also Abū Darda ever spending his days in fasts and nights in prayers.

The trainees of this Institution include men of wisdom, such as, Talhā, Zubayr, Moghīra, Miqdād, Sʿad b. Muʿādh, Sʿad b. ʿUbāda, ʿUsaid b. Hudayr, Asʿad b. Zarārah, ʿAbd ar-Rahmān b. ʿAuf and Sʿad b. Zubayr. They come from the businessmen of Mecca and the farmers of Madina but everyone of them proved his worth as a capable administrator, a statesman or a prosperous businessman.

Another group of men we come across here are those who gave their life for their faith but never thought of retracing their steps. Hāla, son of Khadīja from her former husband was minced by infidels; Samīya, the mother of ʿAmmār died of the injury inflicted by Abū Jahl; Yāsir was cruelly tortured on the rack to die a violent death; Khubayb was crucified; Zayd welcomed death by bowing his head before the assassin's scimiter; Harām b. Milhān and his seventy companions were treacherously done to death at Bīr Maūʿna by the tribes of Usāyya, Riʿl and Dhakwān; ʿĀsim was slain with seven others at al-Rajʿī by Banū Hudhayl; the blood of Ibn Abī al-ʿAujā and his forty-nine companions was shed by Banū Salīm in 7 A.H./628 A.D.; Kʿab b. ʿUmar Ghifārī and his friends were massacred in the plain of Dhāt ul-Atlʿā but the martyrs never strayed from the path of truth they had discovered at the feet of their teacher. A well-known religion flatters itself of the crucifixion of a single man, but how many martyrs were there among the learners of this school of Madina?

Life is lost only once whether it be taken by the blade of the sword, or the head of the spear, or the hangman's rope. But, greater was the endurance of those who had to bear persecution for years: those who were made to lie on the burning charcoal and the hot sands of Arabia, the men on whose chests were placed heavy rocks and those who were dragged around by the rope tied round their necks. They were asked to deny Muhammad and his God, but

nothing save the sound of 'One, One' came out of their throats. During the period of boycott imposed by the Quraish on the Muslims, the Prophet and his kinsmen had very often absolutely nothing save the leaves of trees to fill their bellies for days together. S'ad b. Abī Waqqās relates that once he happened to lay his hands on a piece of dry hide which he roasted and took with water. ʿUtba b. Ghazwān says that seven of his friends had developed sores in their mouths by taking these unnatural things. When Khabbāb b. al-Aratt embraced Islam he was forced to lie flat on the burning charcoal until the fire cooled down under him. Bilāl was regularly thrown on his back in the hottest season of the Arabian desert and then a great rock used to be placed on his chest. He was often dragged around by the rope put round his neck. Abū Fukayha was very often tied by his legs and pulled along, throttled and a heavy rock so big was placed on his chest that his tongue used to come out. ʿAmmār was frequently forced to lie down on burning sand and beaten mercilessly. Zubayr was rolled up in a mat by his uncle and made to inhale smoke. Saʿīd b. Zayd was too often bound with ropes and beaten, and so was tortured ʿUthmān by his uncle. But none recanted, none repented, nor anybody ever forsook the faith once accepted by him. They were all surely possessed by the truth that never gives way to falsehood.

Is it not surprising that the unlettered and uncultured, rude and savage Bedouins, worshippers of idols and fetish, were turned into wise and polite, cultured and sagacious people by one of them, who was as unlettered as any of them? How could the unarmed Prophet make commanders and generals of them? How did they get the reservoir of courage and intrepidity through a man who was himself helpless and defenceless? How were the people who had never bowed their heads before God, made reverent worshippers, pious and godly? You have just had a glimpse

of Muhammad's great seminary and its learners of various categories: scholars, legists, warriors, judges and rulers They included the poor as well as the rich, slaves as well as masters and combatants as well as martyrs. Have you not reached the conclusion that here was that superman, Muhammad, the emblem of perfection, whose virtues were reflected, in different shades and colours, in his companions and disciples? It was the Prophet's sagacity which showed its face in Abū Bakr and ʿUthmān; his intrepidity found expression in Khālid and Abū ʿUbayda, Sʿad and Jʿafar Tayyār; his devotion, piety and prayers illuminated the arch and pulpit in the form of Ibn ʿUmar, Abū Darr, Salmān and Abū Dardā; his knowledge and learning brightened the minds of Ibn ʿAbbās, Abī b. Kʿab, Zayd b. Thābit and ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd; and his patience displayed itself in the perseverance of Bilāl and Suhyeb, ʿAmmār and Khubayb. Like the glorious lamp of heaven Muhammad illumined every nook and corner of the world, the peaks of mountains, sandy deserts, running streams and verdant pastures; his were the streams of rain showering life and vitality over all lands and peoples, which helped all nations to blossom out its latent qualities.

Regardless of the varied talents and accomplishments of the Prophet's companions, the feature uniformly conspicuous in all was the sparkling spirit of faith. Whether one was rich or poor, a king or a friar, a ruler or the ruled, a judge or a witness, a commander or a cavalier, a teacher or the taught, an ascetic or a trader, a fighter or a martyr, Muhammad's light of love-divine, spirit of selflessness, zeal for sacrifice, sympathy for his fellow beings, and, above all, his ardour for achieving the pleasure of God had made a dent in every heart. Whatever position one occupied and wherever one happened to be, this was the burning emotion that kept all of them restless, irrespective of their differing dispositions and individual traits. Their God was one, the Qurʾān was their common Scripture, they owed allegiance to the

same Prophet, bowed their heads in the same direction and the ultimate aim of their endeavour was the same—to make this world a better place for the mankind, to do good to every man, to preach the message of God to one and all and to make the truth triumphant over everything else.

These are but brief glimpses of Muhammad's many-sided and comprehensive character. His diverse qualities are like flowers of different colours and hue. Like the natural phenomena, human character also shows a multi-fariousness of characteristics, traits, dispositions and capacities. And, for the guidance of all these diverse human characters and characteristics, there can be no comprehensive and everlasting guide and teacher save Muhammad, the last of the prophets of God. This is the reason why God commanded Muhammad to proclaim : "If ye love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you." "Follow me," only Muhammad can say, "if you love God, whether you are a soldier or a commander, a teacher or a student, a beggar or a millionaire, a subject or a ruler, a saint or a commoner—for the path of virtue and goodness and righteousness lies only in following my example."

Blessings of God be upon him, his family and his companions.

SIX

PRACTICALITY

"Verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example."

(Q. XXXIII: 21)

How to follow an apostle of God is an important question, though, unfortunately, hardly touched upon by the biographers of earlier prophets and founders of religions. In the case of Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, however, this is the most detailed and illuminating part of his biography. The practical examples set by him are, of a fact, so redolent that they alone would be sufficient to demonstrate his finality of prophethood and leadership of all the saints, sages and prophets sent by God for the guidance of human race.

There has never been any dearth of the words of wisdom, couched in sweet and pleasing phrases, but what is lacking is the act and the deed—the deed demonstrating the impressive aphorisms. If one goes through the biographies and writings of religious preceptors, one would find interesting doctrines, engaging parables, elegant discourses and graceful utterances which would undoubtedly be fascinating, but one would labour in vain to discover how these great sages had themselves acted upon their precepts.

Morality is the practical system of human behaviour making a distinction between the right and the wrong. Still, no religious scripture has claimed, like the Qur'ān, that the promulgator of its faith was the best in conduct amongst his followers. But the Qur'ān asserts:

> "Nay, verily for thee (Muhammad) is a Reward unfailing, And lo! thou (standest) on an exalted standard of character."[1]

The two verses cited here are coordinative according to their grammatical construction since they imply the inference of one statement from another. The first clause claims a "great reward" for the Prophet, which is abiding also, while the latter gives the reason for it. Unfailing recompense is promised to him because of his sublime nature and character. Such was the Messenger of Allah who had demanded from the people: "Why say ye that which ye do not?"[2]

The Prophet had a right to ask this question for he always did what he said. Weigh the characters of two prophets, just for a comparison, one on the Mount of Olives and the other on the Mount of Safa, and you would see the difference. One has lofty homilies unaccompanied by any practical example while the other does whatever he preaches. To forgive your enemy after you have gained power and authority over him is noble and virtuous, but the quietism of a weak and helpless person cannot be taken as a proof of his eschewing revenge. One can only lay a claim to negative virtues, say, by not hitting anybody, not killing anyone, not being wrongful, not laying hands on another man's property, not constructing a house for oneself, or not amassing riches. He may have committed none of these wrongs but the question is whether he has helped anyone, saved anyone from being killed or done any good to someone,

1. Q. LXVIII : 3-4
2. Q. LXI : 2

given away something to the needy, given shelter to someone or distributed alms to the poor and destitute? World needs positive virtues for an act consists of doing something and not merely of abstaining from it. The Qur'ān is quite clear on this aspect of Muhammad's character.

> "It was by mercy of Allah that thou wast lenient with them (O Muhammad), for if thou hadst been stern and fierce of heart they would have dispersed from round about thee."[1]

This verse talks about the kindheartedness of the Prophet and also adduces the proof that "they would have dispersed from round about" him if he had been stern and hardhearted.

Again, the Qur'ān says:

> "Then hath come unto you a messenger, (one) of yourselves, unto whom aught that ye are overburdened is grievous, full of concern for you, for the believers full of pity, merciful."[2]

The Qur'ān speaks here of the concern of Muhammad for the welfare of entire humanity. God informs that the persistence of the unbelievers in their ungodly ways is sure to invite divine wrath, and this is heartrending to His Apostle. The merciful nature of the Prophet and his ardent desire to save mankind from the impending catastrophe impels him to call the people to the path of righteousness. He is even more kind to those who listen to his call. The revelation, thus, testifies to the kindliness of Muhammad for the whole mankind, in general, and to the Muslims, in particular.

This is the testimony of God about the character of Muhammad.

The revelation contained in the Qur'ān consists of

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1. Q. III : 159
2. Q. IX : 128

divine commands which you may call the teachings of Islam. But, the Scripture is also a running commentary on the practical conduct of Muhammad as an Apostle of God. There was not an injunction revealed to him that he did not demonstrate by his own example. He talked about faith, Unity of God, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, poor-due, charity, fighting in the way of God, self-sacrifice, determination, perseverance, endurance, thanksgiving, virtuous deeds and morals and demonstrated everyone of these by setting a personal example. It is no exaggeration to claim that his life was an illustration of what one finds written in the Qur'ān. Once a few companions asked ʿĀyesha about the moral virtues of the Prophet. She replied, "Have you not read the Qur'ān ? "His character was the exponent of the Qur'ān," says another tradition handed down in the *As-Sunan* of Abū Dawūd. The Qur'ān contains precepts in words and phrases while Muhammad's life is their practical demonstration.

Nobody can claim to know a man more intimately—about his character, behaviour and disposition—than his own wife. When Muhammad made the claim that he had been bestowed the mantle of divine apostleship, he had been married to Khadīja for fifteen years. This was a sufficiently long time for any woman to know her husband to his heart and soul. But, what was the opinion formed by Khadīja about her husband. The moment he told her about the revelation and his prophethood, Khadīja accepted his words without the least hesitation. It was the Prophet himself who was a bit perplexed, but she assured him : "Nay, it will not be so, I swear to God. He will never make thee melancholy or sad, for you are kind to your relations, you speak the truth, you clear the debts of others, you help the poor, you are hospitable, you assist your fellowmen and you bear the afflictions of people in distress."[1] Such had been

1. *Al-Sahih*

the Prophet's conduct even before he was chosen by God for apostleship.

Of all the wives of the Prophet, one more dearly loved by him after Khadīja, was ʿĀyesha who had spent nine years of her life with the Prophet. She affirms: "He never spoke ill of anybody. Instead of returning evil for evil, he used to forgive those who gave offence to him. He was always clear of iniquity and never had his revenge. He never hit any maid or slave or servant or even a dumb creature. He never turned down a seemly request whosoever made it."

Among the relatives of the Prophet, nobody was closer to him than ʿAlī. He had been with the Prophet from his childhood. He bears witness that "the Prophet was of cheerful disposition, kindhearted and had a clear conscience. Warmhearted and gracious, he was never harsh to anybody nor did he ever cast reflection upon anyone. If he disliked the request made by someone, he normally kept quiet instead of giving a blunt reply or acquiescing to such demands. Those who knew his habit, understood what he meant by his silence. He never liked to sadden anybody; rather, he used to set the hearts at ease; he was kind compassionate."

ʿAlī further adds: "He was benevolent, lavishly generous, truthful and exceedingly kindhearted. It was a pleasure to have his company. Whoever met him for the first time was filled with awe but with closer contact became attached to him."[1]

The well-known British historian Gibbon has also expressed almost the same opinion about the character of the Prophet.

Hind, son of Khadīja from her former husband, says about the Prophet: "Kind of heart, he was nice and sweet-tempered. He never liked to displease or cause offence to

1. *Tirmidhī*

anybody. He thanked others even for trifling favours. He took whatever food was placed before him without making any adverse remark. He never got angry for anything concerning his own person, nor did he think of taking revenge or letting down anybody, but if anyone opposed what was just and right, he used to get sore and helped the right cause with all his might."[1]

These are the testimonies furnished by those who were close to the Prophet and knew him like the back of their hands. How unblemished would have been the character so praised by those who had a long and intimate experience of his conduct and behaviour?

Another aspect of the Prophet's character, which is even more praiseworthy, is that he always practised what he preached to others.

The Prophet called upon his companions to develop a deep and abiding affection for God through worship and remembrance. Leaving aside the living awareness of God, conspicuous in the life and character of the Prophet's companions, let us see how far the Prophet himself lived up to his teachings? Was there a single moment throughout the day and night when he lost the communion or was forgetful of God? Illuminated by the light-divine that had broken in upon him, he maintained consciousness of the living, loving God whether sitting or walking, eating or drinking, sleeping or waking. A great portion of the *ahādīth*, extant today, consists of his supplications, beseechments and glorification of God, which he used to recite on different occasions. The *Hisn Hiseen* is a book of two hundred pages containing the implorations which he used to offer from time to time. Every word of these litanies burns and breathes of his unbounded devotion to God and his impassioned admiration for Him since these were embedded deep into

1. *Tirmidhi*

his heart. The Qur'ān, speaking of the pious and God-fearing souls, says:

> "Such as remember Allah, standing, sitting and reclining."[1]

This is how the Prophet spent his life. ʿĀyesha says that he used to be ever engrossed in the remembrance of God.

The Prophet enjoined upon his followers to offer prayers, but how did he pay the divine honours himself? He had made the obligatory prayers, five times a day, incumbent on others, but it was his custom to be on his knees eight times every day. Besides the five prayers of *fajr*, *zuhr*, *ʿasr*, *maghrib* and *ʿishā*, he also offered the prayers of *ishrāq*, after sunrise, *chasht*, when the sun had well risen and *tahajjud*, after midnight. These three were voluntary prayers not incumbent on every believer. A man normally performs seventeen *rakʿats* of prayer in the five obligatory ones, but the Prophet continued to offer about sixty *rakʿats* throughout his life. He never missed even the midnight orisons. He used to stand in the prayers for such lengths of time that his legs often got swollen. When ʿĀyesha once remonstrated with him: "Why do you take all this trouble? God has already redeemed you." "What," she got the reply, "Should I not behave like a thankful servant?" His was not the supplication arising out of fear or awe, but was an expression of his ardent devotion and unbounded love for God. He used to remain bowed before his Lord for spells so long that it appeared as if he had forgotten to move over to prostration.

The Prophet had begun offering prayers from the very beginning of his ministry. The pagans of Mecca detested his way of orison, but he always offered prayers in the Kʿaba in front of the holy sanctuary. Many a time he was attacked by the disbelievers while he was engaged in prayers,

1. Q. III : 191

but he never left the practice. It was still more difficult to offer prayers in the din of warfare when the enemy rode full tilt against his small body of followers, seeking the Prophet to end the dispute for ever. But no sooner than the time did arrive for prayers that he was leading the faithful in the service of God. In Badr, when the two armies were arrayed against each other, he hastened to his prayer mat to raise his hands supplicating God for the victory of his ill-equipped force. Never was he late in offering the prayers, nor were even two of them missed concurrently. Once, in the Battle of Trenches, he was not able to say *ʿasr* prayers owing to the fierce assault by the enemy, and then, on another occasion, he had to offer pre-dawn prayers after the sunrise since everybody had fallen asleep after a night-long journey. After the Apostle's illness had worsened, a few days before his death, he came to the mosque supported by two of his companions in order not to miss the congregational prayer. When he was unable to get up, towards the fag end of his life's journey, and was relapsing into swoon, he tried thrice to join the congregation but fell down unconscious after each attempt. This was the way the Prophet showed, by his own example, how one should pay homage to God.

The Prophet commended keeping of fasts throughout the month of Ramadhān. But, in addition to these, he punctuated every week with a fast or two. "When he took to the keeping of fasts", says ʿĀyesha, "it appeared as if he would never give them up." The Prophet forbade his followers to prolong the voluntary fasts beyond a day at a time, but he himself used to fast continuously for days together without even taking anything during the night. If his companions tried to emulate him, he dissuaded them saying: "Who amongst you is like me? My Lord provideth sustenance to me." Normally, he kept fast for the whole of two months during Shʿabān and Ramadhān, the 13th, 14th and 15th of each month, the first ten days of

Muharram, six days following the ʿId-ul-fitr, and on Mondays and Thursdays in every week.[1] In this manner did the Prophet teach his followers how to keep fasts.

The Prophet impressed the merit of almsgiving, but he also showed the way to it by his own magnanimous charity. We have mentioned elsewhere how Khadīja had praised his philanthropy—"You clear the debts of others and help the poor." Muhammad never asked his followers to forsake their houses, brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers and children for his sake,[2] nor did he advise them to sell all they had and give the money to the poor.[3] He did not even say that it would be very hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.[4] "Spend of that We have bestowed upon thee" was the divine command and the Prophet exhorted to give away a part of one's earnings in charity as an act of thanksgiving to one's Lord. But how did he himself act on his precept? He always gave away whatever he had with both hands. Booty of war came laden on camels but he never kept anything for himself or his family. Extremely frugal in his habits, spending days after days without anything to satisfy his hunger—this was the way of living chosen voluntarily by him. After the capture of Khaibar in 7 A.H./628 A.D., his normal practice was to distribute the cereals received after the harvest among his wives for their maintenance. But before the year was over, a large part of it was given away in charity with the result that his household had to live from hand to mouth for several months. "More generous than all of us," says Ibn ʿAbbās, "was the Apostle who used to give away freely during the Ramadhān. He never said 'no' in reply to any request, and never took his food alone. No

1. *Mishkāt al-Masābīh*
2. Mt. 10 : 37
3. Mt. 19 : 21
4. Mt. 19 : 23

matter in what small quantity were the victuals available, he invited all those present to partake it with him. He had asked us to inform him if any Muslim died without paying his debts, for he always took the responsibility to repay it. The legacy of the deceased, of course, devolved on his heirs." Once a Bedouin said to him rudely. "All this does not belong to thee or thy father. Let my camel be loaded with it." Instead of taking ill to his insolent remark, the Prophet immediately agreed to his suggestion and got his dromedary laden with date and oats. He often used to tell his companions: "I am a trustee charged to apportion everybody's share. Verily, the donor is Allah."

Abū Darr, a companion of the Prophet, relates that once he accompanied the Prophet going somewhere in the night, when he remarked: "Abū Darr, if the mount of Uhad were turned into gold for me, I would not like three nights to pass with a single *dinār* left in my possession. Of course, that excludes whatever I may keep apart for clearing somebody's debts."

This was not merely a pious wish but the words of a Prophet expressed with the determination to act on his precepts. And he always did act in that manner. A large amount of tithe was once received from Bahrain. The Prophet directed the companions to store it in the courtyard of the Mosque. Next morning he came to the mosque for performing his prayers but passed by the heap of treasure without even setting his eyes on it. The prayer ended, and he sat down near the bags distributing the money to one and all. He stood up only after he had given away to the last shell as if it were a filth which he wanted to get rid of as quickly as possible.

Another time cereals loaded on four camels were brought from Fadak, which was meant to meet the requirements of the Prophet's family. A portion of it was first given away in satisfaction of the debt incurred earlier. Then Bilāl was asked by the Prophet to distribute the

remainder to the poor and the needy. Bilāl, however, reported after some time that some of it was still left as nobody was available to receive the charity. Extremely perplexed to hear the news, the Prophet remarked: "I cannot go to take rest in my house so long as this worldly pelf remains lying here." He spent that night in the mosque and went to his house early next morning when Bilāl told him that the good gracious God had been kind enough to unburden him of his care. The Prophet thanked God before returning to his house, but he came back, visibly agitated, after a short while. When asked about the reason for his coming back, he replied, "It recurred to my mind that this small piece of gold was also lying in my house. I feared lest the sun should go down again and it remains with me."

Umm Salmā has related another incident. She says: The Prophet looked sad and melancholy when he came to my house one day. On being asked the reason for it, he said, "Umm Salmā, the seven *dinārs* I had received yesterday are still lying on my bed." There is another episode of even greater significance. It is related that when the Prophet's illness took a turn for the worse and he was lying on his bed restless with an splitting pain in his head, he suddenly recalled that a few gold sovereigns received earlier had not been given away. He implored to give away the sovereigns atonce with the words: "Shall Muhammad meet his Lord while he had these sovereigns still with him?"

Such was the example of charity set by the holy Prophet.

The Prophet of Islam commended frugal living and contentment. It has been stated earlier that spoils, tithes and poor-dues came to Madina laden on pack-animals from every nook and corner of the country. But the ruler of Arabia more often had nothing in his house, not even enough to make the two ends meet. ʿĀyesha related after

his death: "The Prophet left this world but he never had a full meal twice in a day." She adds that the day he died, she had nothing with her except a handful of oats. His coat of mail had already been pawned with a Jew. He used to say: "Son of Adam has no right to possess anything except a small hut to live, a pair of clothes to wear, simple bread to eat and water to fill his belly." He perhaps alluded to his own way of living in this manner, for, he had a mud house with only one room, thatched with date-leaves and camels' hair. ʿĀyesha says that she never had to keep the Prophet's dresses, meaning thereby that the clothes put on by him were the only one he had at that time. Once a beggar came to complain that he was hungry. The Prophet sent words to his wives but none had anything to offer except water.

Abū Talha relates that once he saw the Prophet lying in the mosque. He was, at the time, hungry and restless. Some of his companions, on another occasion, complained of hunger to the Prophet and showed him the slab of stone each had tied to his stomach to mitigate the aching void. They found the Prophet still more famished for he had tied two slabs of stones to his stomach. At times his voice showed that he was starving. Another time, when he had had nothing to eat for quite a few days, he went to see Abū Ayyūb Ansārī who immediately brought some fresh dates and got some victuals cooked for him. Before taking anything brought to him, he sent a bread with some meat to Fātima who had also not taken anything for the last two days.

Fātima and her two sons, Hassan and Husain, were deeply loved by the Prophet, but he never fondled them with costly clothes and jewellery. Once he saw a gold necklace round the neck of his daughter. He admonished her saying, "Fātima, do you want the people to say that Muhammad's daughter is bedecked with the necklace of fire?" Fātima atonce took off the necklace and sold it to

liberate a slave with its price. Similarly, on another occasion, he got his beloved wife ʿĀyesha to cast off gold bracelets she had been putting on. The Prophet often used to remark: "Man needs only that much of the world as a wayfarer requires petty cash to meet his urgent needs." This was not a piece of advice meant for others. Some of his companions who were pained to see the marks of a rough mat on his body, offered to provide him a soft bedding, but he dismissed their suggestion with the remark: "What have I to do with the world? Only that much is lawful for me as a rider going on his errand requires rest under a shady tree."

The entire belongings of the Prophet in 9 A.H./630 A.D., when the frontiers of the Islamic State had extended from Yemen to the borders of Syria, consisted of an under-garment which hung down a few inches below his knees, a rough bed-stead, a pillow filled with the bark of date, a handful of barley, a hide-skin and a water pail. This was all he possessed, and such was his contentment with bare subsistence!

Many a preacher can be seen exhorting others to become noble-minded and eschew selfishness, but does anyone himself observe that golden rule? Nevertheless, here is an exalted example of one who preached this lofty ideal not through words but by his deeds. All of us know how Muhammad adored his favourite daughter, Fātima, but this very beloved daughter had to live in such reduced circumstances that she had developed blisters through driving the handmill and drawing water from the well. Distressed and pinched by her privations, she approached her father one day to ask for a maid servant. The reply she got was, "Fātima, my daughter, no provision has yet been made for the poor *Suffah* companions. How can your request be granted?" Another reply ascribed to him is: "The orphans of Badr had made a request before you did."

A companion presented a shawl to the Prophet at a time when he needed one. A man present on the occasion remarked, "How fine!" The Prophet presented the shawl to him instantly. Another time, a companion had to celebrate certain function but he had nothing to entertain his guests. The Prophet directed him to go and take a basketful of flour from ʿĀyesha although nothing else was available for his own household on that day. Once he came to ʿĀyesha with his *Suffah* companions and asked her to bring whatever food was available. A few breads, some soup of dates and a cup of milk were all that was available in his house to entertain the guests. This is how the Prophet taught the lesson of self-denial and contentment to others.

What endurance and patience is needed to demonstrate one's absolute reliance on God? For a practical example of it we shall have, again, to turn to Muhammad, the Prophet of God. The Lord had commanded the Prophet:

> "Then have patience even as the stout of heart among the messengers (of old) had patience."[1]

And, he calmly endured all the hardships and insults heaped upon him by an unmannerly and harsh people. The Meccans, among whom he was born, were uncultured and boorish, arrogant and insolent. Unwilling to hear a word against their deities, they were always ready to kill and be killed rather than countenance disgrace to their idols. But the Prophet cared nothing for their wrath and always went to preach the Unity of God in the sanctuary of the Kʿaba. This was also the rendezvous of the Mecca's chieftains, but Muhammad had made it a point to prostrate before the Lord, within their sight, without paying any heed to their furious opposition. Then was received the divine command:

> "So proclaim that which thou art commanded."[2]

1. Q. XLVI : 35
2. Q. XV : 94

We know how Muhammad carried out this command by summoning the whole of Mecca from the summit of Mount Safa. The persecution of the lonely Prophet started. They manhandled him, abused and oppressed him, threw rubbish over him, tried to strangulate him, sowed thorns in his way, but never did he stop from publishing God's religion. When his uncle Abu Tālib hinted at abandoning him, the inspiring reply he gave to his uncle was: "O my uncle, by God, if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left on the condition that I abandoned this course, I would not do so until God has made it victorious, or I perish therein." He was forced to withdraw in the vale of Shu'yeb Abū Tālib for three long years, nothing reaching him and his family in the confinement. He was exhausted and the children and the old were emaciated by taking leaves of the trees to satisfy their pangs of hunger. At last, the conspiracy was hatched to kill him but he remained firm and unshaken. He took refuge in a cave where he was almost tracked down by the enemy in hot pursuit of the fugitives. His companion then mumbled in terror: "Oh, Apostle of Allah, we are only two here." The Prophet, however, had ample of patience and faith in God. "Grieve not", he replied, "Lo! Allah is with us."[1] Again, during the same journey when Sarāqa got near the two on his horse, Abū Bakr could not help crying out "O Messenger of Allah, we have been caught." The Prophet was even then serene and calm, chanting the Scripture with full confidence in the succour of his God.

Madina was also not safe from danger. Threatened by surprise attack of his former enemies, he had also snakes of his bosom like the Jews and hypocrites of Madina. Guards were detailed for keeping night-long vigils but, then, the revelation was received; perhaps, again, to demonstrate what faith in God meant to the Prophet.

1. Q. IX : 40

"Allah will protect thee from mankind,"[1] assured the Lord, and he promptly came out to ask the guards to go away and take rest since God's protection was enough for him.

On his return from an expedition to Najd, the Prophet was taking rest under a tree. No companion was near him. A Bedouin came forward with an unsheathed sword in hand and demanded from the Prophet: "Muhammad, who can now save you from me?" The Prophet's sleep was disturbed, he opened his eyes and said calmly: "Allah." The reply was so reassuring, so full of trust in God that the enemy put his sword back in the scabbard!

The same was the story at Badr also. One thousand well-armed Meccans were locked in battle against three hundred Muslims not all of whom were under arms. But where was the Commander of these three hundred empty-handed soldiers? Away in a corner of the battlefield he could be seen bowing and prostrating and lifting his hands in prayer. "O God," he was entreating, "if they are destroyed today, Thou wilt be worshipped no more."

There were also occasions when the Muslims had to suffer a defeat. They were, at times, so overwhelmed by the charging enemy that they had to run for their lives but the one who had absolute trust in God, stood firm at his place like a rock. At Uhad the Muslim forces were put to flight and the enemy slew many of them. The Prophet, however, stuck to his place. He was hit by a stone, fell on his side and one of his teeth was smashed; his face was scarred, his lips were injured and blood smeared his face. Still, he did not unsheath his sword, for he was confident of the help of his Lord. Again, in the battle of Hunayn, when the Muslims were terrified by a sudden attack and took to their heels none heeding the other, the Apostle dismounted from his dromedary and called out: "Where

1. Q. V : 67

are you going men? Come to me. I am God's Apostle. I am Muhammad, the son of ʿAbd Allāh."

Is there any other Commander who holds fast to his post in the battlefield even after his army takes to flight? Who neither takes to the sword nor loses his heart but remains firm in his faith in God! Who does not forget even in such a precarious situation to beseech the help of God for granting him victory! Such was the heroism and the fortitude and the faith of Muhammad since he had to set an example for those who fight solely for the sake of God.

You would have heard the preachment "Love thy enemy", but would have never seen how the enemy is loved? It is not necessary to present here the hardships undergone by the Prophet at Mecca where he was persecuted and helpless, for it is no use making a virtue of necessity. When Muhammad was migrating to Madina, the pagan chiefs of Mecca had set a reward of hundred camels for capturing him alive or dead. Sarāqa b. Mālik b. Juʿshum took to his horse in pursuit of the Prophet, thrice did he cast his divining arrows and thrice he gōt the reply: "Do him no harm." He refused to be put off and went ahead but, lo, thrice his horse stumbled, its forelegs went into the ground, throwing him away from the horseback. He then came to the conclusion that the Prophet was protected against him and would have the upper hand. Psychologically speaking, he had lost his nerves. He decided to turn back, but before doing so he called out to the Prophet requesting to write him a document of safety for the day when he would gain victory over the Meccans. The document was promptly given to him. Sarāqa embraced Islam after Mecca was captured. When he came to see the Prophet, the latter did not e en ask Sarāqa why he had gone in pursuit of him on the behest of his enemies.

You know Abū Sufyān alright. He was the leader of the

Quraish in the battles of Badr, Uhad and Trenches, to name but a few. How many Muslims were killed because of him and how many times had he tried to root out Islam and kill the Prophet? He was such an arch-enemy of Islam that when he came to see the Prophet, just before the conquest of Mecca, alongwith ʿAbbās, all those who were present on the occasion recommended to kill him. But Abū Sufyān was confident in his heart of heart that Muhammad would never take revenge. And, he was right, for Muhammad not only forgave him but also allowed him to proclaim that whoever would enter his house in Mecca would be safe against the assault of the invading army.[1]

Hind, the wife of Abū Sufyān had been present in the battle of Badr inciting the pagans of Mecca to fight to the last against Muslims. In the battle of Uhad she had cut off the ears and noses of Muslim martyrs to make anklets and collars. She had cut out the liver of the Prophet's uncle Hamza and chewed it and so mutilated his dead body that the Prophet was sickened to see it. After the capture of Mecca she came veiled in disguise to accept Islam, but was still insolent in her replies to the questions asked by the Apostle of God. She was, nevertheless, forgiven without being asked to explain her previous conduct. Astonished by the remarkable mercy of the Prophet, Hind exclaimed: "Muhammad, no tent I hated aforetime more than yours, but none is now dearer to me than your pavilion."[2]

Wahshī had killed Hamza in the battle of Uhad. When Mecca was conquered, he fled to Tā'if, but when Tā'if also surrendered, he was in an impasse but someone said to him, "Good heavens, what is the matter? He does not kill anyone who enters his religion. You cannot get peace anywhere except in his company." He came back to seek forgiveness. The Prophet recalled the mutilated corpse

1. Ibn Is'hāq (The Life of Muhammad), p. 548
2. Ibn Is'hāq (The Life of Muhammad) p. 553

of his uncle on seeing Wahshī, but condoned his crime. He simply said: "Hide your face from me and never let me see you again."[1]

ʿIkramah was the son of Abū Jahl, the worst enemy of the Prophet. He hated Islam like his father and had fought against the Muslims on several occasions. After Mecca was occupied by Muslims, he reflected over his past crimes and thought it wise to leave for Yemen. His wife, Umm Hakīm, embraced Islam and repaired to Yemen to console him and to bring him back to Mecca. As soon as the news of his arrival was received, the Apostle got up so hurriedly that his shawl fell from his shoulders. He hailed ʿIkramah with the words: "Welcome to thee! O emigre rider!" Father of this man had been the leader of persecutors, and had caused the Prophet untold miseries. Was rubbish not thrown by Abū Jahl over the Prophet and had he not conspired to kill him? Had he not led the infidels against Muslims at Badr and rejected every counsel of peace with the Muslims? But now, his son was received with open arms to tell the world that the enemy is loved in this wise![2]

There was another man, Habbār b. al-Aswad by name, who was responsible for the death of Muhammad's daughter, Zaynab. He was one of those few heartless criminals who had been condemned after the conquest of Mecca. He wanted, at first, to go away to Iran, but on reconsideration went straight to the Prophet and confessed his guilt. "I wanted to leave for Iran," said he, "but looking back to your clemency I have come to you, O Prophet of God. The reports you have received about me are all correct." Confession of Habbār so softened the heart of the merciful Apostle that he forgave him instantly forgetting even the death of his own daughter!

1. Ibn Ish'āq (The Life of Muhammad), p. 376
2. *Ibid.*, p. 551

ʿUmayr b. Wahb was another leader of the Quraish of Mecca. Shortly after the battle of Badr he sharpened his sword and smeared it with poison, and went off to Madina to seek his revenge from the Prophet. He was seen entering the mosque and was taken prisoner. His guilt was proved, but the softhearted Prophet allowed him to depart in freedom. ʿUmayr had agreed to kill the Prophet on the promise of another chief, Safwān b. Umayya, who had undertaken to discharge his debts and to support his family. After Mecca had fallen to the Muslims, Safwān fled to Jidda to take a ship for Yemen. ʿUmayr, however, told the Prophet that Safwān was the chief of his people, who had run away to cast himself into the sea. The Prophet was so moved by the plight of his former enemy that he granted him immunity. On ʿUmayr's request for a sign to prove it to Safwān, the Prophet gave him his turban with which he had entered Mecca. ʿUmayr overtook Safwān before he could embark the ship and begged him to return with him. Safwān was not agreeable, however. He said: "I go in fear of my life because of Muhammad." But ʿUmayr who was not very long ago after the blood of the Prophet replied: "He is too clement and too honourable to kill you." At last Safwān returned and asked the Prophet: "I have been told that you have granted me immunity. Is it correct?" When the Prophet replied in affirmative, Safwān asked for two months in which to make up his mind, and the Prophet gave him four months to decide. But four months was a pretty long time in the company of the merciful Prophet. Safwān accepted Islam well before the time was up.[1]

When the Prophet led an expedition to Khaibar, the stronghold of the Jews, and captured the city after a fierce battle, a Jewess brought a roasted lamb poisoned by her to kill the Prophet. After chewing a morsel of the meat

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1. Ibn Ish'āq (The Life of Muhammad), p. 555

the Prophet came to know of the poison and asked to produce the woman before him. She confessed what she had done, but the Prophet let her off although he suffered from the toxic effect of the food brought by her for the rest of his life.[1]

On yet another occasion, a disbeliever was apprehended on the charge of lying in wait to kill the Prophet. He was in a flutter, when he was produced before the Prophet, because of fear, but the Prophet consoled him saying: "Don't fear. You could not have killed me, even if you wanted to do so."

A band of eighty warriors was rounded up just before the capture of Mecca. It wanted to bear down upon the Prophet, but was let off by the merciful Apostle of God.

You would have surely heard of Tā'if. It was the city which had refused to grant asylum to the persecuted Prophet. It had declined even to listen to him. Here it was that encouraged by 'Abdu Yālīl, its chief, the touts and slaves had insulted and shouted and pelted stones on the Apostle until his shoes were filled with his blood; and when he had sat down tired and brokenhearted to take some rest, the touts had compelled him to move along amidst their missiles. How could the Prophet forget the sufferings of Tā'if, for it was the worst of torments he had had to endure in his whole life. In 7 A.H./628 A.D., the Muslim army had laid a siege of Tā'if but it had to retire after suffering a loss, since the walls of the city could neither be scaled nor gave way to the besiegers. The Muslims who did not want to raise the siege without reducing the city begged the Prophet to curse the people of Tā'if. But, when he raised up his hands in prayer, he was heard not cursing the people of Tā'if but invoking blessings for them. "O God, guide the people of Tā'if and make them accept

1. Ibn Is'hāq (The Life of Muhammad), p.516

Thy religion," was the prayer sent up by the merciful Apostle of God.

In the battle of Uhad when the Muslims were put to flight and the enemy tried to get at the Prophet, he was hit by a stone which smashed one of his teeth, his face was scarred and his lip was injured. The Prophet's incisor was broken and blood began to run down his face. He wiped the blood saying the while: "How can a people prosper who have stained their Prophet's face with blood while he summoned, them to their Lord? O God, show them the right path for they know it not." This was the practical example of loving one's enemy. It demanded putting one's life at stake rather than preaching a high flown dictum to the peaceful crowd.

We have mentioned ʿAbdu Yālīl, the cruel-hearted chief of Tā'if. When he ultimately came to Madina, the Prophet got a tent pitched for him within the sacred mosque. He had parleys with Abdu Yālīl, after the night prayers were over, and told him about the hardships undergone at Tā'if. The love and respect accorded to the former enemy was yet another example of loving one's enemy not through words but by deeds.[1]

When Mecca fell to the arms of the Prophet, all the chiefs of the city assembled in the courtyard of Kʿaba. This was the place where the Prophet had once been insulted and beaten, where conferences of the elders of Mecca used to be held for doing away with him, and the persons present were those who had persistently denied and opposed him. They were the persons who had poked fun at him, pelted stones upon him, sown thorns in his way, tortured and killed the helpless believers and instigated the whole of Arabia to destroy the Prophet and his faith. On that day they all stood as criminals, conscious of their guilts, surrounded by ten thousand well-armed warriors

1. Ibn Ish'āq (The Life of Muhammad), p. 615

ever willing to square the past accounts with them. At last the Prophet broke silence and asked: "O Quraish, what do you think that I am about to do with you?" "Good, Muhammad", they replied, "You are a noble brother, son of a noble brother." The Prophet then gave his verdict: "Go your way for you are the freed ones."[1]

This is how the enemy is loved and forgiven—a shining example without any parallel in the annals of the world. One has not to indulge in rhetorics and high sounding words to teach a lesson, but to wade through blood and tears for setting a noble example.

It should now be clear why Islam invites us to follow not merely the injunctions of its Scripture but also demands to take after the example of the Messenger of divine Scripture. If other religions only ask to comply with the teachings of their founders, it is because they do not have any living model of their preceptors. The Prophet of God had told his followers a few days before he departed from this world:

> "I have left you two things, and you will not go astray as long as you hold these fast. The one is the Book of God and the other is my own way."

These are the two lighthouses of guidance still pointing out the way to virtue and goodness, and so shall they remain to the end of time. "Verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example," says the Lord to ratify the Apostle's dictum.

Islam, thus, presents the practical example of its Prophet in support of its teachings, and this is its distinguishing feature amongst the religions of the world. It does not merely say "Offer prayers," but also asks its Prophet to exhort, "Offer prayers as you see me praying." Similarly, the Prophet directs his followers: "The best amongst you

1. Ibn Is'hāq (The Life of Muhammad), p. 553

is he who is good to his wife and children, and I am the best of all in being good to my wife and children." Take another example. During the last *haj*—the Haj of Farewell—the Prophet has a hundred thousand believers round him. He intends to convey the message of God, the principles of peace and justice and human brotherhood; but he does not forget to illustrate everything he wants to preach by his own example. He says:

> "All the blood shed in the pagan past of Arabia is to be left unavenged. The first claim on blood I abolish is that of my own nephew, the son of Rabī'a b. al-Hārith b. 'Abd al-Muttalib. All the usurious transactions are abolished this day and I abolish first of all the claims of my uncle 'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muttalib."

Security of life and property of the individuals is the basic need of every civilised society. Next comes 'honour' which more often than not means acting in accordance with the prevalent customs, rites and etiquettes of the society. To abolish any customs, even stale and useless, is to incur disgrace in the eyes of one's compatriots. For an undying shame is attached to the discontinuance of time-honoured customs even the greatest reformers have often found it difficult to mark a total break with the social usages and conventions. But, what is the record of Muhammad in this regard? Slaves were accorded the lowest place in pre-Islamic Arab society. The Arabs were so conscious of the nobility of blood and race that they even deemed it a dishonour to fight an enemy unequal to them in social standing—it was shameful to stain one's sword with the blood of a low-born man. This was the mood and temper of Arab society when the Prophet declared:

> "Lo! you are all sons of Adam and Adam was created of clay. The blacks have no precedence over the whites nor the whites over blacks: Arabs enjoy no superiority over non-Arabs nor the non-Arabs over Arabs. The best amongst you is one who is more

pious, God-fearing."

This declaration brought all, the high and the low, the master and the slave on an equal plane, but it had to be accompanied by a striking example to catch the imagination of the people. Allah's Messenger, therefore, declared his slave to be his adopted son. Going a step further, he married his own cousin sister, belonging to the noblest and blue-blooded tribe of Quraish, to his freed serf Zayd, who had since been adopted as his son. It was then that the writ of God was revealed abolishing all artificial relationships, as the custom of adoption was, in order to restore the hereditary rights of blood-relations. Zayd b. Muhammad again became Zayd b. Hārith.

For the time-honoured customs die hard, social reforms seldom succeed unless pressed to their logical end. But, the task was difficult as well as dangerous, because marriage with the widowed or divorced wife of the adopted son was looked down upon by the Arabs as ignominious and incestuous. The commandment of God had, nevertheless, to prevail, if only to curb the evils emanating from that custom, although it meant sealing one's infamy. The holy Prophet had again to set an example by marrying the divorced wife of Zayd. He broke the age-old custom of the pagan past and put an end to the system of adoption and its evils for ever.

There are many more examples to be cited but the limited time available would not permit me to do so. Still, the instances just given are enough to set you thinking whether there is any other teacher and guide of humanity right from Adam to Jesus Christ who was able to present such illustrious models of practical morality in every field of life ?

A few words more and I would finish the day's discourse. You would have seen several eloquent preachers talking about the spiritual coupling of the Heavenly Father

and His only begotten Son. But, if a tree is known by its fruits, you have to see whether divine love was also discernible in the life of its gospeller ! Read the biography of the adorer of God born in Arabia and you would find that when the whole world fell asleep, this lover of God used to bow down in worship, his hands raised in prayers, his tongue singing the praises of God, his heart troubled and uneasy and his eyes shedding tears in holy breathing. Does this present the picture of love or the life of Jesus ?

When Jesus was crucified he "cried with a loud voice saying, *Eli, Eli lama sabach thani*?—My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me."[1] But when the Prophet breathed his last he was reciting *"Allāh-ur-Rafīq-al-ʿAla*—My Lord, my dearest friend."

Whose was the spirit of piety that flowed into his life and conduct and mode of expression ?

1. Mt. 27 : 46

SEVEN

THE MESSAGE OF MUHAMMAD

We have seen how, of all the prophets and founders of religions, Muhammad alone has left eternal and shining models of virtuous behaviour for the guidance of humanity. These are, in truth, exemplifications of goodness and godliness, upheld by reason and proved by history. Now, the question arises: What are the teachings of this universal Guide? Are they ever-abiding and do they constitute an improvement on the divine message received aforetime through the earlier messengers of God? For in the ages past apostles of God did bring guidance and light from on High; it was only that their messages perished since they were not meant to live on for ever and ever. And, since, the chain ended with Muhammad, his teachings must remain alive to the end of time.

The prophets of yore were messengers of truth, but only to the people among whom they were born, or for a particular age. Their teachings were short-termed, for God had not undertaken to hold them on for years on end. The original teachings of all the earlier prophets were, thus, either lost, or imperfectly compiled many years after their death, or interpolations were made in their scriptures, or they were even changed out of recognition by their scribes.

translators and annotators. Sometimes, these scriptures were mutilated within a few years of the death of apostles bringing them and, what is more, there was never maintained any authentic and reliable record of how these scriptures and teachings were handed down by their followers. Now, if everything is governed by the Will and Wisdom of God Almighty, this in itself constitutes a sufficient testimony to the ephemeral character of the earlier scriptures and teachings of their prophets. Then came the everlasting message of God through Muhammad which has remained ever-new since the day it was brought by him. It shall ever remain fresh for no other message is to come from God again. Of a fact, God never told any other messenger that the message vouchsafed to him was complete and perfect or that He intended to preserve it from oblivion. The earlier scriptures were lost because their perenniality was not guaranteed by God. They vanished like dreams, for God had willed them to be so. Actually, far from containing any reference to the permanence or perfection of these scriptures, one finds, in whatever portions of them that are extant today, passages indicating their transitory character and reason for their ultimate extinction.

Moses says in the Torah :

> "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me ; unto him ye shall harken.[1] ....I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth : and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him."[2]

The blessing Moses invoked for the children of Israel, before his death was :

"The Lord came from Sinai,
And rose up from Seir unto them ;

1. Deut. 18 : 15
2. Deut. 18 : 19

He shined forth from mount Paran,
And he came with ten thousands of saints;
From his right hand went a fiery law for them."[1]

Torah declares, unequivocally, in the passages cited above, that another prophet like Moses would be raised by God who would speak only what God would bid him to say. Does it not show that the message and the guidance and the law brought by Moses was not for ever?

Another Prophet of the Old Testament, Isaiah, foretells about the advent of the servant of God who "shall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles."[2] The new Prophet "shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgement in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his law."[3] Malachi, yet another Prophet, makes the prediction, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me."[4] Psalms and other books of the Old Testament contain similar prophecies about the prophet to come in due time. These divinations afford a conclusive proof against the abiding nature of the Jewish scriptures.

Let us now turn to the New Testament. It quotes Jesus as saying:

> "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever."[5]

Jesus further says:

> "But the Comforter, *which is* the Holy Ghost, whom the father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."[6]

Explaining why the last and abiding guide would be sent

1. Deut. 33 : 1-2
2. Is. 42 : 1
3. Is. 42 : 4
4. Mal. 3 : 1
5. Jn. 14 : 16
6. Jn. 14 : 26

by the Father, he says:

> "I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak; and he will show you things to come."[1]

These verses of the Gospel affirm that the Christian Scripture is also not the last word of God nor is it perfect. It announces the coming of another man of God in order to carry through the work left incomplete by Jesus Christ. But the revelation received by Muhammad neither speaks of any new messenger of God to give any new message nor it alludes to its being incomplete. On the contrary, it declares:

> "This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you."[2]

The Qur'ān goes on even further to proclaim Muhammad as "the Seal of Prophecy", while Muhammad, on his part, asserts that "there would be no apostle after me."[3] Several other traditions of the Prophet elucidate the point further. "I am the last brick of the edifice of prophecy," says a tradition handed down from the Prophet. In fact, not a single verse of the Qur'ān alludes to the advent of any new prophet after Muhammad. Thus, if we were to go by the internal evidence contained in the scriptures of different religions, that is, their own claims in regard to being the last and final message sent by God for the guidance of human race, only the revelation vouchsafed to Prophet Muhammad would stand the test of perfection and finality, and would be found destined to be preserved in its purity to the end of time. God has, accordingly, undertaken the responsibility

1. Jn. 16 : 12-13
2. Q. V : 3
3. *Muslim : Bāb-al-Masjid*

to preserve it unchanged; for He assures: "We verily are its Guardian."[1]

Another question that ought to be given thought is: Has any other divine communication, besides that received through Muhammad, a universal character? So far as the Jews are concerned, the world is all the same to them as Bani Israel. Hebrew prophets never preached their faith among non-Israelites: Bani Israel are the 'chosen race' and their God is the god of their own tribe. Jesus Christ, too, emphatically denied that he had been sent to any people save "the lost sheep of the house of Israel."[2] He even refused to preach the Gospel to the gentiles for he did not consider it "meet to take the children's bread and to *cast it* to dogs."[3] *Vedās* were, likewise, not permitted to reach the ears of non-Aryans as all other races were unclean in the eyes of ancient Aryans. Molten zinc was to be poured in the ears of unclean *sudrās* if they happened to hear the sacred *Vedās*.

The message of Islam was, thus, the first and the only divine gospel of glad tidings preached by Muḥammad to all, to the blacks and the whites, to the Arabs and the non-Arabs, to the Turks and the Tatars, to the Indians and the Chinese and to the Africans and the Europeans. Just as Islam called its God as the 'Lord of the Worlds,' it also declared its Prophet as the 'Mercy for the Worlds.' Its message was for one and all, universal and world-wide. The Qur'ān says:

> "Lo! it is naught but a Reminder to (His) creatures."[4] "Blessed is He who hath revealed unto His slave the criterion (of right and wrong), that he may be a warner to the peoples. He unto whom belongeth the

1. Q. XV : 9
2. Mt. 15 : 24
3. Mt. 15 : 26
4. Q. VI : 91

sovereignty of the heavens and the earth."[1]

Muhammad was sent as a warner for all the peoples and his ministry extended to the entire world encompassed by the Kingdom of God.

> "Say (O Muhammad): O Mankind! I am the messenger of Allah to you all—(the messenger of) Him unto whom belongeth the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth."[2]

His message recognised no distinctions of race and country. He was bidden to declare that—

> "This Qur'ān has been inspired in me, that I may warn therewith you and whomsoever it may reach."[3]

And, Muhammad was told by God:

> "And we have not sent thee (O Muhammad) save as a bringer of good tidings and a warner unto all mankind."[4]

Islam is, thus, the only religion which claims to be the last, final and universal message of God for the entire humanity. A tradition related in the *Sahīh* of Muslim quotes the Prophet as saying: "The prophets before me were sent to their people, while I have been raised for all the nations of the world." The claim made by the Prophet of Islam is fully corroborated by history. In truth and reality, the religion preached by the last Prophet is as much perfect, ever-abiding and universal as are his own life and character perfect models of goodness and virtue for all the people and for all times to come.

Now, the searchlight needs to be turned to find out what actually constitutes this universal, perfect and perpetual principle of human guidance which supplemented and completed the previous religions and perfected the

1. Q. XXV : 1-2
2. Q. VII : 158
3. Q. VI : 19
4. Q. XXXIV : 28

blessings of God on His creatures.

The precepts of every religion can be divided into two parts; one, that which fulfils the innermost urge of human heart, and, the other, that which relates to his terrestrial existence. The first, satisfying the soul, is known as *imān* or faith, and the second, governing the body, as *ʿamal* or action. The latter can further be sub-divided into devotions to God or *ʿibādat*, dealings between the people or *muʿāmalāt*, and lastly, the morals or *akhlāq*. These four, the beliefs, devotions, transactions and the morals comprise the fundamental teachings of every religion, and in presenting a perfect concept of each of these Islam excels all religions.

The creeds of Judaism and Christianity as enunciated in the Old and New Testaments are rather vague. Old Testament does mention of the existence and Unity of God, but it is hardly satisfying to the head and heart. The attributes of God constitute the wherewithal for spiritual perfection and are a means to attain the gnosis and love of God, but neither the Old nor the New Testament contains anything about it. Next to the concept of God comes prophecy, but all the scriptures of revealed religion prior to that of Islam, woefully fail in describing the nature and purpose of prophecy and revelation, the worth and merit of divine apostles, their appearance in all the countries and nations for the guidance of human beings, and their impeccability, moral rectitude and the great task performed by them. We find some faint traces of such concepts as retribution in the after-life, hell and heaven, Day of Judgement and similar other matters in the Old Testament while the Gospels contain only a few sketchy answers given by Jesus Christ in reply to a question posed by a certain Jew about these matters. There are one or two sentences about the heaven and the hell in the New Testament. This is all that these two Scriptures have to offer about what is known as the creed of revealed religions. But one can find detailed

answers to each of these questions in the Qur'ān and the teachings of Muhammad.

The conception in regard to angels presented in the Old Testament is again quite hazy: it is rather difficult to distinguish between God and the angels as described in the Jewish Scriptures. Christian Gospels mention a few angels, but one of them, known as Holy Ghost, so resembles the Divine Being that one may call him both God and an angel or neither of the two. Islam, on the other hand, clearly defines their nature, status and functions and the relationship they bear to God, and His apostles and to other creatures of God. This is how Islam has given a most perfect creed among all the religions.

We can now turn to human actions in relation to God and their fellow beings. Worship occupies the first place, in every religion, amongst all the actions of human beings. The Old Testament speaks of oblation in some detail and prescribes the rituals and other essential conditions for the offering of sacrifices. It also makes a few references to fasting, supplications and even to the *Beit il* or the House of God, but all these are referred only casually or accorded such an insignificant place in its narrations that one is very often apt to miss them altogether. It neither describes the method and the rules for offering prayers nor says anything about the timings of worship. The Book of Psalms does contain a number of litanies and adorations, but it is again silent about how to perform the divine service. Worship occupies a still more negligible place in the New Testament. At one place it speaks of the forty days' fast of Jesus Christ when he is reported to have been 'ahungered.'[1] The Gospels record even the objection raised by the Jews: 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?'[2]

1. Mt. 4 : 2
2. Mt. 9 : 14

The prayer offered by Jesus is also mentioned; during the night before crucifixion when the Master is reported to have taught a prayer to his disciples. This is the only occasion when Jesus teaches something about paying homage to God, but what about other devotions and the way of offering them? None at all! In Islam, however, everything is lucid and well-defined; prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, the method and the conditions necessary for their observance; remembrance of God, devotional exercises, hours of prayer, the days and timings for keeping and the termination of fasts; the time, rules and rituals for performing the *haj*; supplications and invocations, contrition, thanksgiving and glorifications, in short, everything about lifting up of the heart and perfection of spirit and attaining the love and fellowship of God is to be found here, described in a perfect and soul-stirring manner.

Dealings concerned with the mutual relations of men and the laws of government, as stated earlier, comprise the rest of human actions. This, in fine, is the social behaviour comprising individual, social and administrative norms of society. The Law brought by Moses is sufficiently detailed on this subject and Islam has preserved the Mosaic Law to a large extent, although it mitigates its severity. In doing so, Islam has transformed the law of Moses from a tribal code to the law of nations. It has not only supplemented but also perfected the Mosaic Law by making suitable alterations and additions. The Book of Psalms and the Gospels contain hardly anything by way of social laws save a few sketchy rules relating to such matters as divorce.

A universal religion, set forth as the abiding principle of human guidance, must needs have a body of laws capable of maintaining an orderly society and the management of its public affairs. For Christianity had nothing of the kind, it had to make free with the laws of the pagan Romans and the Greeks. Islam, on the other hand, formulated its

own laws and presented such principles of legislation which could be amplified for developing new legislations capable of meeting the ever-changing needs of human society. Islam has since held sway over the world, at least for a thousand years, and during this period hundreds of kingdoms have adopted its law as the law of the land. They were all not only able to sustain civilised societies and viable governments with the help of the Law of Islam, but none has yet been able to improve upon them.

Morals constitute the third part of human action. Torah contains a few moral principles. The famous Ten Commandments of Moses really include seven[1] of these moral principles of which only one, that is, 'thou shalt honour thy father and mother' can be deemed to be a positive norm while the remaining six are negative in character. These are: Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his house, nor his field, nor his manservant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's.[2] Now, coveting one's neighbour's wife being identical to committing adultery, and the malicious desire to get hold of another man's property being much the same as stealing, there are in fact only four commandments of negative character instead of six. The New Testament merely repeats these commandments with one addition which is to love one's neighbour.[3] Islam has, on the other hand, amplified these five moral norms into twelve fundamental principles of ethical behaviour, as mentioned in the chapter of *Isra*, which was revealed by God on the occasion of Muhammad's ascension. One of these twelve relates to the Unity of God and the remaining eleven pertain to the moral behaviour. Five of these are negative, five are of a

1. Exod. 20 : 12-20
2. Deut. 5 : 17-21
3. Mt. 19 : 19

positive character and the last is a combination of both. These are:

1. Honour your parents.
2. Render unto others what is due to them.
3. Deal kindly with the orphans.
4. Fill the measure when you measure and weigh with right balance.
5. Fulfil your promise.
6. Slay not your children fearing a fall to poverty.
7. Slay not the life of which Allah has forbidden save with right.
8. Come not near unto adultery.
9. Follow not that whereof you have no knowledge.
10. Walk not in the earth exultant.
11. Squander not your wealth in wantonness but take the middle path.

These fundamental principles of morality show how Islam has perfected the Mosaic Law and brought it to completion. These laws lay bare the voice of conscience, point out the fount whence virtue springs and show us the failings of our desires. They bring to light the devil within our nature and tell us how to conquer it.

This is how Islam shapes human action.

If we want to sum up Islamic teachings in a two-fold principle, it could be called as faith in God and righteous action. These two cover the entire teachings of the holy Qur'ān and the Prophet of Islam, and on them depends salvation of man in the hereafter. The Qur'ān addresses the believers, at scores of places, as those who believe and do right and presents success and salvation as the fruits of these two. It would not be possible to go here into the details of the Islamic concepts of faith and righteous action, and hence let us confine ourselves to those aspects of Muhammad's message which have set right the misconceptions about these two perpetrated by the earlier religions.

These were the mistakes of a fundamental nature which had kept humanity bound to grossness and corruption for ages.

The first of these fundamental issues, as held up to the view of humanity by the Prophet Muhammad, was the place occupied by man in the universe, particularly, in comparison to other created beings. This really constitutes the base of the doctrine of Divine Unity. Man regarded himself, before the advent of Islam, as inferior to most of the beings and objects. A mortal fear of the rocks, high mountains, running streams, verdant trees, raining clouds, blazing fires, dense forests, vipery snakes, rising sun, luminous stars, starry dark nights, roaring lions, milch cows and ugly old women ; in short, everything that could do him harm or good scared him to death. He bowed his head in reverence before every conceivable thing or phantom but Muhammad told him, for the first time, that none of these was his Lord and Master. Man was, explained Muhammad, the paragon of creation for everything had been created by God for his service. It was the holy Prophet who told him that man being the vicegerent of God on earth was the ruler to whom every other created being bowed in obeisance. Man had not been created to serve the world, but the world was created for his service. Declared the Qur'ān :

> "And when thy Lord said unto the angels : lo ! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth."[1]

> "He it is who hath placed you as viceroys of the earth."[2]

The new message from God, appointing man as the deputy of God on earth, bestowed on him a unique and undreamt of honour.

> "Hast thou not seen how Allah hath made all that is in the earth subservient unto you.[3]

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1. Q. II : 30
2. Q. VI : 166
3. Q. XXII : 65

> "Verily We have honoured the children of Adam."[1]
>
> "He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth."[2]

And, the cattle were his servitors, rather than claimants of obeisance from him.

> "And the cattle hath He created, whence you have warm clothing and uses, and whereof you eat."[3]

The rains and the vegetation growing therefrom is for the benefit of man.

> "He it is who sendeth down water from the sky, whence ye have drink, and whence are trees on which ye send your beasts to posture. Therewith He causes crops to grow for you, and the olive and date-palm and grapes and all kinds of fruit."[4]

Even the day and the night, the sun and the moon and the stars are all for the service of man.

> "He coverth the night with day, which is in haste to follow it, and hath made the sun and the moon and the stars subservient by His command."[5]

The rivers flow, not to be revered by man, but to be pressed into his service.

> "And He it is who hath constrained the sea to be of service that ye eat fresh meat from thence, and bring forth from thence ornaments which ye wear. And thou seest the ships ploughing it that ye may seek of His bounty, and that haply ye may give thanks."[6]

The Qur'ān has many more verses emphasising the importance of man in the scheme of creation. A gnostic poet[7] of Persia has very well summed up the whole idea in

1. Q. XVII : 70
2. Q. II : 29
3. Q. XVI : 5
4. Q. XVI : 10-11
5. Q. VII : 54
6. Q. XVI : 14
7. Sʿadi of Shirāz

a verse which says—

> The clouds and the wind and the sun and the moon and the sky keep busy,
>
> That ye lay your hands on the bread and eat not carelessly.

This was the message, brought by Muhammad, lifting the man up as the deputy of God, placing the crown of honour on his head and assigning him a central place in God's creations. To bow his head before any of these creatures became below his dignity: it rather meant demeaning his honour and prestige.

Man had been used to prostrate himself before the kings and the saints. The Pharaohs and the Nimrods, the Popes and the pontiffs and the monks and the friars had always hood-winked the simple-minded amongst men by laying a claim to a superior honour as the shadows of God and partakers in His divinity. This was an affront to human dignity which was rooted out by Muhammad. He proclaimed the divine writ that one should "worship none but Allah" and "ascribe no partner unto Him."[1]

The writ of God commanded the prophets to proclaim:

> "None of us shall take others for lords besides Allah."[2]

The celestial beings, among the creations invisible to man, and the prophets, among the creations of their own species, were certainly venerable but none could now claim the obeisance due to God.

> "And He commanded you not that ye should take the angels and Prophets for lords."[3]

Muhammad lifted up man so high that he could not now throw himself on his knees before anybody save God:

1. Q. III : 64
2. Q. III : 64
3. Q. III : 80

nor could he even ask anyone for a favour except the Lord and Master. He told man that God alone had the power to give and take away whatever He liked.

"And He it is Who in the heaven is God, as in the earth God"[1]

"His verily is all creation and commandment."[2]

"The decision is for Allah only."[3]

"Who hath no partner in His Sovereignty."[4]

The message of Muhammad the Prophet had, besides raising the status of man, another far-reaching consequence. Exclusive allegiance to the One and only God meant that nothing was Caesar's; all was God's. For the sovereignty and the kingdom and the command in heavens and earth belong to God, there is no king or emperor to demand anything that ought to be rendered to God. A man believing in this sublime concept of God's sovereignty would never agree to bow his head before any created being—the day and the night, the heavens and the earth, the rulers and the ruled, the forests and the deserts and the hills and the rivers. He would not stand in awe of anything, nor an earthly power could strike terror in his heart. The consequences of this spiritual principle and its significance for the worth and dignity of mankind are in reality so trenchant, so unbounded that it would be difficult to explain them.

The next principle of the fundamental teachings of Muhammad is that man has been created guiltless, free of all stains of previous sins. He is born with an upright nature. It is his action that makes an angel or devil of him. Iniquity degenerates man's primordial nature and blackens

1. Q. XLIII : 84
2. Q. VII : 54
3. Q. VI : 57
4. Q. XVII : 111

his character. It was the greatest glad tiding man had ever received, for, he had always been told to hang his head in shame. In China, Burma and India, the eastern religions had preached, and the doctrine had been accepted by some philosophers of Greece also, that the fate of man is predetermined by the deeds of his previous life. The belief in rebirth had, in consequence of the previous sins, condemned man to become indolent as well as indifferent to righteousness. It was a heavy stone placed on him which could neither be removed by his goodness nor moral rectitude. Actually, the birth in the world was itself a sign of one's sinfulness. Christianity marked no improvement, however. Instead of presenting a saner principle of life and morality, it joined its faith to the belief in the original sin of the old Adam. It preached that every man born in the world was evil in nature because he inherited the sin of his first forefather. And, this burden of guilt needed a sinless divine redeemer who could atone for the sins of human beings by sacrificing his own life. These were the beliefs which had made man sad and melancholy when Muhammad came to proclaim that man was born blameless. It was a message of faith and hope for it told man that his actions alone were accountable in shaping his destiny ahead. He called upon all men to keep in the right path and shun the ways of evil.

> "By the fig and the Olive,
> By Mount Sinai,
> And by this land made safe;
> Surely We created man of the best stature,
> Then We reduced him to the lowest of the low,
> Save those who believe and do good works,
> And theirs is a reward unfailing."[1]

A message of hope, indeed, it was, for the humanity was threatened by the besetting sin of previous life and the

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1. Q. XCV : 1-6

original sin of a distant forefather. It declared man to be born of best stature, innocent and guiltless. Now he had power to make or mar his future through his own efforts.

"By the soul and Him who perfected it,
And inspired it (with conscience of) what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it.
He is indeed successful who causeth it to grow,
And he is indeed a failure who stunteth it."[1]

Far from being of an evil nature, man is always born with an upright nature.

"Lo! We create man from a drop of thickened fluid to test him;
So We make him hearing, knowing,
Lo! We have shown him the way,
Whether he be grateful or disbelieving."[2]

The Qur'ān also calls attention of man to his responsibility.

"O man! What hath made thee careless concerning thy Lord, the Bountiful,
Who Created thee, then fashioned, then proportioned thee ?
Into whatever form He will, He casteth thee."[3]

Muhammad explained that religion was the demand of human nature or rather the two were identical. Vice was nothing but a sickness, not inherent in man's nature, but an extraneous growth.

"So set thy purpose for religion as a man by nature upright—the nature (framed) of Allah, in which He hath created man. There is no altering (the laws of) Allah's creation. That is the right religion, but most men know not—."[4]

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1. XCI : 7-10
2. Q. LXXVI : 2-3
3. Q. LXXXII : 6-8
4. Q. XXX : 30

The message contained in this verse of the Qur'ān was admirably explained by the Prophet when he said that "no infant is born who has not an uncorrupted soul, but it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magi. Every beast gives birth to a wholesome cub. Do you see them being born with deformed ears ?"

It is not difficult to imagine what a news of goodness and cheer would have been the message of Muhammad. How it gave hope to the humanity condemned for the sins never committed by it and how it instilled the sense of responsibility and freedom into every man who was given power to work his way to everlasting salvation !

Before the advent of Islam, the world was divided into different tribes, clans and families, each one of them keeping aloof and being indifferent to one another. To the sages of ancient India the voice of God could be heard nowhere save their own sacred land. Their God was the god of their own country whose blessings were limited to a few selected castes and clans of the rulers and priests of the Aryaverta. Zoroaster listened to the message from on High, but only for the people of the blessed Iran. Bani Israel believed in the voice of prophecy, but the prophet of peace, whom they awaited, could not come from any people except from the lineage of David. No country and no people were willing to share even God's grace and blessings with a people not their own. It was then that Muhammad came with a message for all the lands and countries. He told the world that divine guidance admitted of no distinction of race and language, colour or country: Palestine and Iran, India and Arabia were all equal in the sight of God. The world was told, for the first time, that God had sent His apostles to every country and nation for the guidance of man.

"And there is not a nation but a warner hath passed

among them."[1]

"And for every folk a guide."[2]

"Verily We sent before thee (Muhammad) messengers to their own folk."[3]

The Jew does not recognise a non-Israelite prophet. For the Christian it is not at all necessary to accept the apostleship of a Hebrew prophet or one born among another people; he is not bound by his faith to acknowledge any messenger of God save Jesus Christ. To the Zoroastrian no country of the world except Iran was illuminated by light-divine. But Muhammad proclaimed that the entire human race living in any country of the world, was the creation of One God, and all the peoples and races were equally blest by the Lord. Whether it was Iran or India, China or Greece, Arabia or Assyria, God had sent the light of His guidance to every nook and corner of the world. His apostles came to show the path of virtue and goodness to all the races and nations. He placed so much emphasis on the universal character of divine guidance that no Muslim could claim to be a believer unless he acknowledged all the messengers of God and all the scriptures or messages brought by them to the people of old. A Muslim has thus to affirm the apostleship of all the prophets of God whether enumerated in the Qur'ān or not, for all of them came with the same message of truth to their own peoples.

According to the Qur'ān, only they are Muslims—

"Who believe in that which is revealed unto thee (Muhammad) and that which was revealed before thee."[4]

Again, at another place, the Qur'ān says :

"But righteous is he who believeth in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Scriptures and

1. Q. XXXV : 24
2. Q. XIII : 7
3. Q. XXX : 47
4. Q. II : 4

the Prophets."[1]

The same *Surah* of the Qur'ān amplifies the doctrine for the third time :

> "Each one believeth in Allah and His angels and His Scriptures and His messengers—We make no distinction between any of His messengers."[2]

No Muslim is permitted to discriminate against any apostle of God.

> "O ye who believe! Believe in Allah and His messenger and the Scripture which He hath revealed unto His messenger, and the Scripture which He revealed aforetime."[3]

Is there any other religion showing the same large-heartedness, teaching equal reverence to all the prophets, all the men of God and founders of religions ? Was such a universal message taught to humanity by anyone before Muhammad ? Such was the tolerance, love and mercy of the last Prophet which encompassed every household and every son of Adam.

The religions of yore had set up intermediaries between man and God. Kahins and priests were mediators in the temples of ancient deities, Jews had entrusted the office to the sons of Lavi who led the liturgical prayers and performed oblations, while Christians had accepted the claim of certain disciples of Jesus and the popes that whatever they would bind would be bound in heaven and whatever they would divest would be removed by God. The popes and pontiffs exercised the power to remit the sins of their followers. Brahmins, among the Hindus, believed that they had been created out of the right hand of God. They had thus the right to form the link between man and his deity

1. Q. II : 177
2. Q. II : 285
3. Q. IV : 136

and to perform the sacred rites on their behalf. But Islam abolished priesthood and with it the evils of priestcraft, the abuse of priestly power and the priestly distortion of religion. It recognised no priests, no rabbis, no popes and no prerogatives to bind and unbind, for God alone had the power over His creatures. It allowed none to intrude between God and his bondsmen. Any believer could lead the prayers, offer sacrifices, solemnize marriages and perform the religious ceremonies. It blazoned the message of God to every human being : "Pray unto Me and I will bear your prayer,"[1] and allowed every man to call and speak and send up his prayer to the Lord with a respectful familiarity. This was yet another freedom granted to the human race from the tyranny of priesthood.

The primitive and pure faith of man has always been led astray by undue adoration of the holy men of God charged to show him the right path. Whenever man has wanted to show his admiration of these pious souls, he has raised them to the pedestal of God, or His like, or His incarnation. The kahins of ancient Babylon, Egypt and Assyria had all the earmarks of the gods and goddesses worshipped by the Hindus. The Buddhas and the Mahaviras were accepted as gods by their followers almost in the same way as Christians had transformed Jesus into the Son of God. But, the ways of man are queer, indeed. Sometimes he showed such a lack of respect for his revered guides and teachers that, like Bani Israel, he gave the name of prophet to every soothsayer and diviner. Foretelling of events, irrespective of one's moral character and spiritual attainments, was enough for the Israelites to call anyone a prophet. This is why we find shameful stories of illicit love and deceit related about Hebrew prophets in the Old Testament.

1. Q. XL : 60

Islam correctly defined the status of the Prophets. It explained that the prophets were neither God, nor His likeness, nor His son, nor yet His kinsmen, for they were mortals like all other men. So very astounding was this concept that the pagans of Mecca could hardly believe their ears. They used to ask the Prophet in amazement: "What, a prophet and a man?" And, the Prophet's candid reply to these men was:

> "Say (Muhammad): My Lord be glorified! Am I naught save a mortal messenger?"[1]

Islam denied that the prophets possessed supernatural powers or had any say in the affairs of God. Even the miracles worked by them were brought about with the permission of God. But, despite the fact that they were human beings, they were not like ordinary mortals since they enjoyed the privilege of conversing with God, were recipients of divine revelations and were free of all sins. As perfect guides of humanity they were a witness to these realities of the celestial realm which are beyond the ken of human perception. They are the assured ones, having wisdom and faith and guidance from the Lord of the world. Every man is thus duty-bound to obey and pay his regards to these truthful souls who are raised to preach the message of God to their fellow beings.

This was the path of moderation—the path avoiding the excesses of undue veneration and denial of the respect due to the prophets and founders of religions—that Islam showed to the world as a necessary adjunct to its higher concept of the Unity of God.

1. Q. XVII : 93

EIGHT

FAITH AND PRACTICE

The original message of all the older religions was overlordship of the One and only God, but the subsequent generations went astray from the right path owing, chiefly, to three causes. The first of these was personification and portrayal of God ; the second, deification of divine attributes into separate deities ; and the third, the failure of man, so often, to comprehend the multiformity of divine acts and manifestations. Muhammad unravelled all these mysteries and expounded the doctrine of the Unity of God so forcefully that man would never commit these errors again. Let us first take the personification of God and His attributes.

God and His attributes as well as the bond of love between Him and His creatures were delineated by earlier religions through imagery and exemplification. These always led to the personification of the Deity in images and figures. The similitudes employed to depict God invariably took the shape of concrete representations in images and idols. The mercy and love of God for His bondmen, at first illustrated through similitudes and symbols, were impersonated in the end. The Aryans regarded women as an emblem of the most tender feelings of affection and this led to the relationship between God and man to be expressed

in terms of kinship between a mother and her child. God was conceived by them as a loving mother of the human beings. To certain other people in the ancient India, the affectionate love of mother for her child was not sufficiently expressive of the stronger emotions of love felt by them for God, and thus their concept of relationship between God and human beings took the shape of husband and wife. Even today one can find friars dressed in women's attires as a mark of their devotion to God. The Romans as well as the Greeks conceived the Supreme Deity in the shape of a female. The Semites, who considered it indecent to talk openly about their womenfolk, visualised God as a father. Archaeological remains unearthed from the ruins of the ancient cities of Babylon, Assyria and Syria show that these peoples had personified God as a man. Similarly, the ancient Hebrews had formed the mental picture of God as the father of human beings and angels. The Scriptures of the Jews even contemplate the relationship between God and Bani Israel as analogous to a husband and his wife. Accordingly, we find Jewish sacred writings describing Bani Israel and Jerusalem as the wives of God. Christians gave a literal interpretation to the description of God as a father. The Arabs also had, before the advent of Islam, concepts of a similar nature. They imagined God as the father of angels who were supposed to be females. Islam, however, discarded all these similitudes and resemblances and forbade even the use of similies and parallels to describe the nature and attributes of God. For the similitudes invariably tended to the anthropomorphisation of God's attributes into a multiplicity of independent deities, Islam curtly pronounced its judgement: "Naught is as His likeness."[1] This shook polytheism to its very foundations. In a small but pithy *sūrah*, the Qur'ān has cleared all the misconceptions about the Supreme Being.

1. Q. XLII : 11

"Say, He is Allah, the One!
Allah, the eternally Besought of all!
He begotteth not nor was begotten.
And there is none comparable unto Him."[1]

In this small but pithy chapter of the Qur'ān, called "The Unity", the very essence of the Oneness of God has been enunciated in the clearest terms possible. It is like a beacon light pointing out the mistake of polytheistic concepts of God.

The message brought by Muhammad did not rend asunder the bond of love between man and his Master. It strengthened the feeling of attachment to God but, at the same time, tried to cast off all anthropomorphic representations picked up due to fervour of love to God with which man has ever been smitten. Islam regards the human passions of heart as passing affections. The love between wife and husband or father and son is, after all, transitory and thus ill-suited to express the sublime and ever-abiding adoration of God by His devoted bondman. Another reason for discarding similitudes is that they very often lead to paganish patterns of thought. Islam, therefore, strictly avoids parallelization as, for example, while commending recollection of God, the Qur'ān says, "Remember Allah as ye remember your fathers or with a more lively remembranco."[2] This verse, it would be seen, does not compare God to one's father, but approximates the love for one's father to that for God. Thus, the Qur'ān avoids the human aspect of relationship between the father and the son but retains the emotion of attachment between the two. It goes on further to add "or with a more lively remembrance" in order to emphasise that even the love for one's father spoken of earlier by it is of a lower order, inferior and plebeian, in comparison to the sublimated ardour for

1. Q. CXII : 1-4
2. Q. II : 200

propinquity to God. Take another example. Asking the believers to evolve themselves spiritually, the Qur'ān says, "Those who believe are stauncher in their love for Allah."[1] It never employs the analogy of father and son by calling God the 'Father of the worlds'; on the contrary, it identifies Him as the 'Lord' or 'Sustainer of the worlds'. It views God as a Being higher and more sublime than what can be expressed by the ephemeral relationship of the father and the son. The excellent names of God are many including *Ar-Rabb*, the Sustainer, who nourishes everything from its cradle to grave; *Al-Wadūd*, the Loving; *Ar-Ra'ūf*, the Kind; *Al-Hannān*, the Affectionate; yet He is neither father nor mother nor bears any resemblance to the created beings.

The second major cause of misunderstanding in regard to God has been the mistake so often committed by the earlier religions in comprehending the divine attributes. People have made a god of every divine attribute in the past. Hinduism impersonated every divine attribute and its conceivable similitude until the immense crowd of its deities reached the figure of three hundred and thirty millions.[2] Even a cursory glance at this pantheon will be enough to convince anybody that the several hands of a god signify his great power while the multiplicity of heads express his super-human wisdom.

If one were to reflect over the different sects of the Hindus, one would find that personification of the different attributes of God has been the chief cause of differences between them. The three great qualities of God viz., creativeness, sustentation and destruction were portrayed as separate deities in the form of *Brahma*, the Creator, *Vishnū*, the Sustainer and *Shiva*, the Destroyer, but gradually the worshippers joined their faith exclusively to one of them.

1. Q. II: 165
2. *Popular Hinduism*, pp. 6-7

Similarly the *Lingāyats* took to the phallic emblem as a token of the creativeness of the Supreme Deity.

The Christians, too, have made three out of One God by accepting the three attributes of God, viz. Life, Knowledge and Will as separate entities. Life was recognised as the Father, Knowledge as the Holy Ghost and Will as the only begotten Son of the Father. We find similar concepts of Trinity prevalent among the Roman and Greek philosophers and the Egyptian neo-Platonists. The Prophet Muhammad, however, pricked the bubble of these false beliefs for he showed that only the stupid and ignorant are deceived by the multiformity of divine attributes. The Qur'ān says: Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds; to Him belongeth every quality, and Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth. The Christians of Arabia emphasised only the compassion of God by calling Him *Rahmān* or the Most Compassionate while the pagans knew Him by the name of *Allāh*. The Qur'ān corrected both when it said: "Say: Cry unto Allah, or cry unto the Rahmān, unto whichever ye cry (it is the same). His are the most beautiful names."[1] It told them further:

> "But, Allah, He (alone) is the Protecting Friend. He quickeneth the dead, and He is Able to do all things.[2]
>
> "Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful."[3]
>
> "And He it is who in the heaven is God, and in the earth God. He is the Wise, the Knower."[4]

Whether one believes it or not, there is no God save Him. He gives life and takes it away, He is the Lord of all those who are alive as also of their forefathers: He is the *Brahma*, the *Shiva* and the *Vishnū*, all in One, whose

1. Q. XVII : 110
2. Q. XLII : 9
3. Q. II : 173
4. Q. XLIII : 84

attributes are countless.

"Praise be to Allah, Lord of the heavens, Lord of the earth, the Lord of the Worlds.

"And unto Him (alone) belongeth majesty in the heavens and the earth, and He is the Mighty, the Wise"[1]

"He is Allah, than whom there is no other God, the Knower of the invisible and the visible. He is Beneficient, the Merciful.

"He is Allah, than whom there is no other God, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, Peace, the Keeper of faith, the Guardian, the Majestic, the Compeller, the Superb. Glorified be Allah from all that they ascribe as partner (unto Him).

"He is Allah, the Creator, the Shaper out of naught, the Fashioner. His are the most beautiful names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifieth Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise."[2]

Such is the Islamic concept of the Oneness or, rather, uniqueness of God: He is essentially a Unitary Being, indivisible and inseparable from His attributes. The religions of old had separated the attributes from the Divine Being, and, in doing so, they had created numerous gods. The Quranic verse, "Glorified be Allah from all that they ascribe as partners unto Him," refers to this very mistake inherent in the polytheistic concept of God. Thus the last message of All-Merciful God brought forth by Muhammad told the wayward humanity that the Supreme Being is Allah, who alone is the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner, the King, the Holy, the Faithful, the Mighty, the Repairer, the Merciful and the Compassionate. He is One, His attributes are countless.

Multifariousness of divine functions is yet another

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1. Q. XLV : 36-37
2. Q. LIX : 22-24

cause of polytheism. The primitive mind believed that there are different celestial forces operating simultaneously—one kills, the other gives life, the third sows the seeds of discord and yet another patches up the differences. They thought that the god of love was different from the god of enmity; if one gave knowledge, the other bestowed riches. The minds untrained in analytical thinking imagined of a thousand deities performing the tasks assigned to them but Islam told them that God is the author of whatsoever happens in the universe.

The interpretation of diverse and dissimilar acts of God into two broad categories of good and bad presented another difficulty to the ancients; they believed that both could not emanate from the same source. Zoroaster offered a solution by developing the principle of dualism. He made one god for everything good and righteous and another one for the bad and the evil. To these twin spirits, he gave the names of *Ahura Mazda* or *Ormuzd* and *Angra Mainyu* or *Ahriman*, whose age-long struggle went on perpetually in the world. Zoroaster was misled because he failed to understand the true nature of the good and the evil. The fact is that there is nothing good or bad by itself, nor is there any virtue or evil in anything: every act assumes the colour of goodness or wickedness by the intention or purpose behind it. Take fire, for instance. If you cook your food, or heat an engine, or allow the poor to get warmth from it, then it would be good and virtuous, but it would be vicious if you burn the hut of a destitute. Fire is thus neither good nor bad, but the use to which we put it makes it virtuous or unvirtuous. The sword is, likewise, neither good nor bad by itself. So is darkness, for it will be iniquitous to steal by taking advantage of the night, but it would be a means to attaining saintliness if you worship the Lord and do good to the poor in the darkness of night away from the sight of others.

God has created this universe, the heavens and the

earth and the matter and the properties embedded in different substances. He created man and also gave him head and heart, intellect and wisdom. Every man can see order and symmetry in the universe and its superb creation and working as well as in different substances and their qualities. All this is enough to take one's breath away who cries out in amazement "Glory be to Allah, the best of Creators." He bows his head in reverence like Abraham who had paid homage to God with the words, 'Lo! I have turned my face toward Him who created the heavens and the earth, as one by nature upright, and I am not of the idolaters."[1] But, there is another man who takes matter to be self-existant and essence of every creation, the cause of all causes, and does not hesitate in speaking out: "There is naught but our life of the world; we die and we live, and naught destroys us save time."[2] The cosmic order is the same, as are its marvels and the working, but it leads one to acknowledge the Supreme Creator while the other is misled by it to deny God altogether. The manifestation of Nature is one and the same for both, but in one case it shows the path of guidance; in the case of other it leaves him in sullen darkness. The truth is that the universe neither offers guidance nor it misleads anybody, for, it is the light of one's own intellect which edifies or misguides him. Conversely speaking, one can claim that the universe is both a guide and a deceiver. Same is the case with the scriptures brought by the prophets of God. We see some receiving guidance and light, consolation and faith by reading the Qur'ān or the Gospels, while others begin to entertain doubts and end up as disbelievers. Verily, the message is one, but the hearts are two. Both these hearts have been created by the One and the same God, not two, although the result is quite dissimilar. This goes to show

1. Q. VI : 80
2. Q. XLV : 24

that the duality of consequences or actions does not necessarily mean that the mover should also be more than one. All the multifariousness of natural phenomena, thus, emanates from the same source; good and evil are bound by the same law, and the master of everything is but one Lord, God of the whole universe.

> "He misleadeth many thereby, and He guideth many thereby, and He misleadeth thereby only miscreants;
>
> "Those who break the covenant of Allah after ratifying it, and sever that which Allāh ordered to be joined, and (who) make mischief in the earth: Those are they who are the losers."[1]
>
> "Allah guideth not disbelieving folk."[2]

These verses of the Qur'ān explicitly state that the prime mover of everything, good and evil, is the Ultimate Being, but in each case it is the upshot of one's own goodness or wickedness. Man disbelieves first, becomes perverted and wicked thereafter, and then goes astray. He never deviates from the right path unless he becomes depraved and corrupt.

God created man and showed him the right path as well as the ways which lead to viciousness and destruction. Says God in the Qur'ān:

> "Lo! We have shown him the way, whether he be grateful or disbelieving."[3]

God is, beyond doubt, the Creator of all that is nice and good as well as that which is evil and bad, for He Himself says:

> "Such is Allah, your Lord, the Creator of all things. There is no God save Him."[4]
>
> "Allah hath created you and what ye make."[5]

1. Q. II : 26-27
2. Q. II : 264
3. Q. LXXVI : 3
4. Q. XL : 62
5. XXXVII : 96

But, let it also be remembered that—

> "Our Lord is He who gave unto everything its nature, then guided it aright."[1]

It is thus man who chooses the path of virtue or wickedness of his own free will : he causes himself to be misled or guided aright of his own accord. If he takes to the wrong path, he would obviously become depraved but if he selects the right one, he would surely be guided on the path of virtue. There is, thus, no vice or virtue except the consequences of one's own free will. It follows, therefore, that the good and the evil are not independent forces which need be deified or should require separate deities. God is one and He is the author of both.

> "Is there any creator other than Allah who provideth for you from the sky and the earth ? There is no God save Him ! Whither then are ye turned ?"[2]

God has sent the guidance through his prophets. Man is at liberty to accept or reject it.

> "Then we gave the Scripture as inheritance unto mose whom We elected of Our bondmen. But of them are some who wrong themselves and of them are some who are lukewarm, and of them are some who outstrip (others) through good deeds, by Allah's leave."[3]

> "Whatever of misfortune striketh you, it is what your right hands have earned. And He forgiveth much."[4]

> "And (He) inspired it (with conscience of) what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it. He is indeed successful who causeth it to grow, and he is indeed a failure who stunteth it."[5]

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1. Q. XX : 50
2. XXXV : 3
3. Q. XXXV : 32
4. Q. XLII : 30
5. Q. XCI : 8-10

Worship was, and still is, a fundamental discipline of every religion. The older religions had, however, mistaken self-torture for veneration of God. They had somehow convinced themselves that the more one suffers agony and subjects one's body to suffering and pain, the more one advances spiritually towards piety and purity of soul. Yoga and monasticism of the ancient India were the results of these misconceived notions, for it was then thought that self-mortification opened the doors to spiritual elevation. Among the Christians, too, atrocious and sordid routines of self-torture had spread in the medieval Europe in the wake of monastic movement. The anchorites of medieval Europe had taken to strange practices; some of them refrained from taking baths throughout their lives, some clad themselves in tatters or tunics made of coarse flex or hemp, some remained unclad even during freezing cold season, some had taken a vow to remain standing for the rest of their lives, some lived in the deserted dens of wild beasts, some always remained in the sun, some dwelt on bare rocks, some ate only leaves of the trees, some scrupulously avoided contact with women and some even hanged themselves upside down from the trees. These ways of worshipping God were deemed highly meritorious all over the West during the dark ages. Other countries of the world were no better, either. It was in this atmosphere, prevailing throughout the world, that Islam came to set right these strange concepts in regard to payment of homage to God. It delivered humanity from these fiendish practices by telling it that self-torture and bodily exertions were neither demanded by God nor they led to the union of the devotee's spirit with the Supreme Being. God appreciates, man was told by Islam, not physical exercises but the purity of heart and intentions. In fact, God never wants man to bear unnecessary hardships. The writ of the Lord is clear enough.

> "Allah tasketh not a soul beyond its scope."[1]

The discipline of religious devotion taught by Muhammad discarded monasticism.

> "But monasticism they invented—We ordained it not for them."[2]

The Prophet is reported to have said:

> "There is no monasticism in Islam."[3]

To those who take a vow to refrain from anything made permissible by God, the Qur'ān puts the question:

> "Say: Who hath forbidden the adornment of Allah which He hath brought forth for his bondmen."[4]

Nobody, not even a pious man is allowed to forsake the world. Once, when the Prophet of Islam had decided not to take honey any more, he was warned by God.

> "O Prophet! Why bannest thou that which Allah hath made lawful for thee?"[5]

Islam told the world that worship essentially consisted of the acknowledgement of complete and unquestioned loyalty to the Lord and Master of the world and was a means to strengthen that bond.

> "O mankind! Worship your Lord, Who hath created you and those before you, so that ye may ward off (evil)."[6]

The message of Muhammad was thus the first direction reaching humanity about the true nature and purpose of worship that man needed to offer up to God. He told the world that lifting up of one's heart to God in complete surrender to Him was all that God demanded of men.

> "Lo! those who scorn My service, they will enter

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1. Q. II : 286
2. Q. LVII : 27
3. *Abū Dāwūd*
4. Q. VII : 32
5. Q. LXVI : 1
6. Q. II : 21

hell, disgraced."[1]

The benefit to be derived from such a form of worship was nothing except this—

> "Lo! Worship preserveth from lewdness and iniquity."[2]

The purpose of worship was thus explained by the Prophet.

> "Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that ye may ward off (evil)."[3]

The pilgrimage prescribed by Islam is also intended to promote remembrance of God.

> "That they may witness things that are of benefit to them, and mention the name of Allah on appointed days over the beast of cattle that He hath bestowed upon them."[4]

Payment of poor-due is another form of divine service enjoined by Islam. It is meant to cleanse the heart of the believers besides affording assistance to the weaker sections among them.

> "Who giveth his wealth that he may grow (in goodness),
> And none hath with him any favour for reward,
> Except as seeking (to fulfil) the purpose of his Lord most High"[5]

The Prophet of Islam expressly forbade celibacy and commanded his followers to enter into wedlock.

> "Matrimony is my practice. Whoever abandons my custom does not belong to me."

Likewise, the Qur'ān describes marriage and progeny as "comforts" to be longed for by man.

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1. Q. XL : 60
2. Q. XXIX : 45
3. Q. II : 183
4. Q. XXII : 28
5. Q. XCII : 18-20

> "And who say: Our Lord! Vouchsafe us comfort of our wives and of our offspring."[1]

Oblation is another form of worship recognised by almost every religion. In the bygone ages people sometimes sacrificed themselves or immolated their children to propitiate their deities. The blood of the sacrificed man or his heart was sprinkled over the idols or was burnt before them. The Prophet of Islam was again the first founder of a religion who explained the real purpose of offering sacrifices and forbade the killing of human beings as well as burnt offerings by way of oblation. The message brought by him opened the eyes of man to the underlying purpose of sacrifice. It declared:

> "And the camels! We have appointed them among the ceremonies of Allah. Therein ye have much good. So mention the name of Allah over them when they are drawn up in lines. Then when their flanks fall (dead), eat thereof and feed the beggar and the suppliant. Thus have We made them subject unto you, that haply ye may give thanks.
>
> "Their flesh and their blood reach not Allah, but the devotion from you reacheth Him. Thus have We made them subject unto you that ye may magnify Allah that He hath guided you. And give good tidings (O Muhammad) to the good."[2]

The perverted beliefs in regard to sacrifice entertained by the people, in the pre-Islamic era, had given rise to many more evils. Man considered himself master of his own life and the lives of his wife and children. Now, the sacrifice of human life being already considered meritorious, suicide, infanticide and *sati* or immolation of widows in the funeral pyre of deceased husbands had come into vogue all over

1. Q. XXV: 74
2. Q. XXII: 36-37

the world. A number of these customs enjoyed even the sanction of different religions. Islam put an end to these malpractices by enunciating the principle that the life of man belonged to God who permitted it to be taken only lawfully. Islam allowed sacrifice of animals only; no man in any circumstances was permitted to offer his own or another man's life to propitiate God. It debarred the people committing suicide from entering the heaven for ever with the result that the incidence of suicide among the Muslims is to this day, much lower than that in the civilised nations of Europe and America. The laws enacted by the Western nations to check suicide have, in fact, proved ineffective since people still consider it to be the easiest method of getting rid of their worries and miseries. The people committing suicide either lack faith in God or consider that God would not question them why they had put an end to their lives. Islam, on the other hand, has been far more effective in checking suicides because it makes human life a divine trust. It tells the people that by taking their lives away they would only be exposing themselves to a heavier penalty in the hereafter instead of ending their worldly worries. Says the Qur'ān :

> "And that ye slay not the life which Allah hath made sacred, save in the course of justice. This He hath commanded you in order that ye may discern."[1]

> "Lo! Those who disbelieve Our revelations, We shall expose them to Fire."[2]

Infanticide, particularly that of daughters, was prevalent among the Arabs, the Rājpūts of India and several other peoples. Being more hardhearted than others, the Arabs even buried their daughters alive. The Qur'ān threatened these people with dire punishment.

> "And when the girl-child that was buried alive

1. Q. VI : 152
2. Q. IV : 56

is asked : For what sin was she slain ?"[1]

Infanticide has, by no means, been a social evil limited only to the past. There may still be persons who would not like to have any children at all for fear of losing their prosperity. So was the case with the Arabs of the pagan past who approved of slaying the unwanted babies. The Greeks also did not lag behind others as they had devised the system of examining every new-born baby with a view to destroying the weaker ones by throwing them away from the hill-tops.

Islam disapproved all these practices, since, in its view, nobody except God provided the means of sustenance. It proclaimed :

> "And there is not a beast in the earth but the sustenance thereof dependeth on Allah."[2]
>
> "Slay not your children, fearing a fall to poverty. We shall provide for them and for you. Lo ! the slaying of them is great sin."[3]

Mankind was divided everywhere on the basis of colour and creed, caste and race. Ancient India regarded all other races and nations as unclean ; it had even divided its own people into four classes, allowed all the rights and privileges to the first three and condemned the fourth to the level of a sub-human species. *Sudrās*, as this fourth and the lowest class was known, were denied even the right to worship God like others. The Parthians, too, had effected a fourfold division of the society depending on vocations of the people. The Romans arrogated themselves as the masters of all other nations while the Jews assuming themselves to be 'the children of God' looked down upon others as goyim or gentiles. But, even this chosen race of God

1. Q. LXXXI : 8-9
2. Q. XI : 6
3. Q. XVII : 31

was not free from internal social prejudices. The Europe of today still considers the white races as superior to the coloured ones. There are still countries where blacks cannot claim equality with the whites, nor can they even travel in the same couch or have their houses in the districts reserved for the whites. Many Americans would still not give negroes the right to live as free citizens in their country while South Africa denies, even now, equality to all the coloured races whether they be Africans, Indians or Asiatics. These distinctions are not confined to social or economic spheres alone, they extend even to the temples of God—the blacks must have churches apart from those meant for the whites. The two cannot even bow their heads together before God! Yet, the message brought by Muhammad abolished every distinction and prejudice of colour and race fourteen hundred years ago. On the very day Mecca was conquered the Quraish, who exulted in their blue blood, were told by the Prophet in the House considered Holy of Holies by them :

> "O Quraish, God has taken from you the haughtiness of paganism and its veneration of ancestors. Man springs from Adam, and Adam sprang from dust."[1]

Then, on the occasion of the Farewell Pilgrimage, the Prophet again taught the lesson of human equality and brotherhood to a hundred thousand persons assembled round him :

> "The Arabs have no preference over the non-Arabs, nor have the non-Arabs over the Arabs ; all of you are sons of Adam, and Adam was created of clay."[2]

The Prophet also explained the reason for denouncing racial prejudices.

> "Allah has abolished the pride and haughtiness of

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1. *Ibn Is'hāq*, (The Life of Muhammad) p. 553
2. *Musnad Ahmad*

paganism. Man is either pious or a sinner. All men sprang from Adam and Adam sprang from clay."[1]

The Qur'ān also repeats the same message:

"O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct."[2]

And also:

"And it is not your wealth nor your children that will bring you near unto Us, but he who believeth and doeth good (he draweth near). As for such, theirs will be twofold reward for what they did, and they will dwell secure in lofty halls."[3]

The Prophet had hidden his followers, on the day of the Farewell Pilgrimage: "Know that every Muslim is a brother unto another Muslim, and that all the Muslims are brethren unto one another."[4] This brotherhood still transcends all the man-made barriers of countries and nations. The blacks and the whites, the Iranians and the Arabs, the Turks and the Mongols, the Negriods and the Europeans submerge their differences in the brotherhood of faith. This is a great blessing from the Lord Most High. All become equals in the kingdom of God; none is an untouchable or a noble; there are no sudrās, no brahmins; the distinctions of wealth and vocations fall down to the ground. All can read the Qur'ān, anybody can lead the prayers; all are equals in the matter of acquiring and diffusing knowledge. All are equals in the eyes of the Law also—a life for life—becomes the governing principle whether one be a sovereign or serf.

There are many more aspects of Islamic canons of equity and equality; the rights it has conferred on women and

1. *Tirmidhi, Abū Dawūd*
2. Q. XLIX : 13
3. Q. XXXIV : 37
4. *Ibn Is'hāq* (The Life of Muhammad), p. 651

slaves, to name only two, can convince any fair-minded person that the present-day Europe with all its claims to light and learning and liberalism, still lags behind Islam. The world can still learn a lot from Islam but the limited time at my disposal would not permit me to shed further light on this question.

The dichotomy of human affairs into spiritual and temporal has been the greatest mischief played with the world by what we know as modernism. This is the division fostered allegedly by a saying attributed to Jesus Christ—render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.[1] This has been the greatest trap into which the world has been drawn in but Islam smashes this snare. It tells the world that every worldly affair undertaken with sincerity and in accordance with the code of morals is meritorious in the sight of God. Everything temporal is, to put it the other way, virtuous if it is backed by morality and faith. It is wrong to think that religion demands withdrawal from the world for remembrance of God or that the earning of one's livelihood, or looking after one's children, relations or countrymen falls in the sphere of mundane affairs. Islam does not accept this view of life; it tells that performance of one's duty with sincerity and fear of God is the highest religion.

Faith in God and good deeds are, thus, the two means of salvation according to Islam. Faith consists of belief in God, His prophets, His angels, His scriptures and retribution in the hereafter. For sincerity and truthfulness depend on faith, no good deed is possible unless it is informed by a heartfelt realisation of God and acceptance of His commands. Action, in its turn, is divided into three parts. The first is the worship or glorification of God. Next come the dealings with fellow beings which cover all the individual

1. Mt. 22 : 21

and social transactions and on these depend the continuance of an orderly society as well as social and economic justice. Morals comprise the third category of human actions which cover all those obligations which, although not legally binding, must be discharged faithfully in order to develop spiritually and to raise the level of society. These four: faith, worship, dealings and morals constitute the pathway to salvation and success according to Islam.

It also needs to be made clear that quiescence or inaction has no place in Islam wich enjoins action and enterprise. Islam is not death, but life, for it declares:

> "And that man hath only that for which he maketh effort."[1]

And, also.

> "Every soul is a pledge for its own deeds."[2]

Islam teaches exertion and struggle, not merely in the recesses of one's heart, but also in the field of action. The life of the holy Prophet as well as the lives of his caliphs and companions are too well-known to all of us. They have shown the way of attaining salvation and success and advancement in this world and the world beyond. Muhammad's message differs from that of Buddha inasmuch as the former teaches not the annihilation of desires but the disciplining of desires. It is also different from the teachings of Christ. Muhammad does not scorn wealth and power, he teaches how to make a proper use of the both.

Thus, faith and virtuous action constitute the matrix of faith in Islam.– It commends action, not inaction; exertion, not indolence; acceptance of responsibility and doing one's duty instead of shrinking selfishly from these. The examples set by the Prophet of Islam and his successors show the way of correct behaviour.

"Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. And

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1. Q. LIII : 39
2. Q. LXXIV : 38

those with him are hard against the disbelievers and merciful among themselves. Thou seest them bowing down and falling prostrate (in worship), seeking bounty from Allah and (His) acceptance."[1]

We find these noblest specimens of humanity, the companions of Muhammad, waging war at times; at others engaged in social service and doing good to their friends and companions; bowing down before God; praising Him very often and seeking their sustenance by hard labour on other occasions; yet, never unmindful of their Lord or His commandments. The Qur'ān portrays their lives in these words.

"Men whom neither merchandise nor sale beguileth from remembrance of Allah."[2]

Thay carry on their trades and professions as well as seek the pleasure of God. They do not give up one for the other, but apply themselves to both in the same breath. Here is an instance preserved by history which illustrates how they spent their lives. At a time when hostilities are going on between the Muslims and the Byzantines, a few enemy spies enter the Muslim camp to find out the morale of Muslim soldiers. They go back and report to their Commander that the Muslim battlers are "anchorites by the night and veterans by the day." This is the ideal way of life taught by Islam and the world needs to learn it afresh.

1. Q. XLVIII : 29
2. Q. XXIV : 37

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GLOSSARY

Ahādīth—Plural of *hadīth*. Prophetic tradition or a short account of some act or word of the Prophet Muhammad. Also see *Sunnah*.

Ahriman—The Divine Being representing the creator of evil and noxious creatures.

Ahura Mazda—The Divine Being that created all that is good and virtuous.

Akhlāq—*Lit.* morals. Covers nature, disposition, habits and manners of a man.

Allāh—The name of the Creator of the Universe in the Qur'ān is Allāh which is derived from *ilāh*, a deity or god with the addition of definite article *al*. It is the essential name of God which has neither feminine, nor plural, nor has ever been applied to anything other than the unimaginable Supreme Being. There are also ninetynine 'excellent names' of God, like *Ar-Rabb*, *'Al-Wadūd*, *Ar-Ra'ūf*, *Al-Hannān* which signify His different attributes.

'Amal—*Lit.* action. Plural 'Āmāl

Amānat—*Lit.* Trust (Arabic *Amānah*)

Amīn—Faithful or Trustworthy. *Al-Amīn* was the title given to the Prophet Muhammad when a youth, on account of his fair and honourable bearing, which won the confidence of the people.

Angra Mainu—See Ahriman.

Ansār—The helpers, the name given to the converts of Madina as opposed to Meccan followers who migrated to Madina and were called *muhājirīn* or migrants.

ʿAqīqa—A custom observed on the birth of a child ; shaving the hair on the infant's head on the seventh or another appointed day alongwith the sacrificing of a sheep or goat to celebrate the occasion.

Asmā'-ur-Rijāl—*Lit.* 'The names of men'. A dictionary of biography of those who handed down the traditions of the Prophet.

ʿAsr—The obligatory prayer offered midway between afternoon and sun-set prayers.

Brahma—The formless spirit of universe from which all beings issue and into which all merge.

Brahmin—The priestly class among the Hindus supposed to have been born from the mouth of Brahma. The other castes are *Kshatriyās*, or the soldier caste, born from the arms of Brahma ; *Vaisyās*, or the agricultural caste, from the loins of Brahma ; and *Sūdrās*, menials, from the foot of Brahma.

Brahmo Samāj—*Lit.* 'Church of God'. A Hindu sect formed in 1830 by Rājā Rām Mohan Roy on theistic i. e. unitarian principle, and the rational ideas and a sense of the brotherhood of man.

Chāsht—A voluntary prayer offered before noon.

Dharam Shāstra—Hindu religious scriptures and canoncial writings.

Dinār—A gold coin of ninety six grams.

Fajr—The obligatory pre-dawn prayer.

Hadīth—*see Ahādīth.*

Haj—The pilgrimage to Mecca performed in the month of Zul-Hijjah or the twelfth month of Islamic calender.

Hajr-ul-Aswad—The black stone studded in the Kʿaba at the north east corner near the door. It is kissed by the faithful after circumbulation of the Kʿaba.

Al-Hannān—*see* Allāh.

Hijrah—*Lit.* 'emigration' applied to the migration of the Prophet of Islam and his first followers from Mecca to Madina ; the beginning of the year in which this emigration took place (July 16, 622) is the starting point of the Muslim era.

ʿIbādat—A general term for religious observance comprising prayer, fasting, *haj*, payment of poor due, etc.

Id-ul-fitr—The festival of fast-breaking at the end of the month of Ramadhān.

Imān—*Lit.* 'faith'. It is a belief of the heart and the confession of the truth to which one joins his faith.

ʿIshā'—The obligatory prayer offered when the night has closed in.

Ishrāq—The voluntary prayer offered when the sun has well risen.

Kitāb or al-Kitāb—*Lit.* 'The Book'. A term used for the Qur'ān and extended to all the revealed scriptures.

Lingāyats—A sect among the Hindus which worshipped the image of the penis as symbolising generative power in nature.

Madrasa—*Lit.* school or educational institution.

Masah—A method of ceremonial purification.

Maghāzī—The books describing the battles fought by the Prophet.

Maghrib—The obligatory prayer offered just after the sunset.

Mahavira—'The Venerable One', was the title of Vardhamana, the founder of Jainism.

Muʿāmalāt—includes such duties as are required between man and man, and covers all the various sections of civil jurisprudence.

Muharram—The first month of Islamic year.

Musnad—Name of certain collections of Prophetic traditions.

Nirvāna—An state of bliss or passionless peace attained through release from all the hampering conditions of life

in the phenomenal world of time and space.

Ormuzd—*see* Ahūra Mazda.

Ar-Rabb—*see* Allāh.

Rakʿat—A unit of prayer consisting of two prostrations and one genuflexion.

Ramadhān—The ninth month of Islamic year when Muslims keep fast during the whole month.

Ar-Raʾūf—*see* Allāh.

Shʿabān—The eighth month of Islamic year.

Sahābah or Ashāb—*Pl.* of *Sāhib*, meaning companion or associate of the Prophet.

Satī—Immolation of the widows with the funeral pyre of the deceased husbands. The custom, since abolished, was in vogue till the beginning of the nineteeth century.

Sharīʿah—The law based on the teachings of the Qurʾān and the traditions of the Prophet.

Shiva—Hindu Divinity representing the destroyer in the trinity in which Brahma is the creater and Vishnū is the preserver. Durga or Kālī is his spouse.

Sihāh Sittah—or the six correct books of traditions recognised as such by the majority sect of Muslims. These are *Al-Jāmī al-Sahīh* of Muhammad b. Ismail al-Bukhārī, *Sahīh* of Muslim b. Al-Hallāj al-Qushairī, *Al-Jāmī* of Muhammad b. ʿIsā Tirmidhī, *Sunan* of Abū Dawūd as-Sajistānī, *Al-Sunan* of Ahmad b. Shua'ib al-Nassīʾ and *Sunan* of Muhammad b. Yazīd Ibn Majah.

Sirah—*See Siyar.*

Siyar—*Pl.* of *Sirah.* The record of a man's actions and exploits. *Kitāb-us-Siyar* is the title given to biographies of the Prophet.

Sudra—The lowest of the four castes among Hindus.

Suffah—Certain poor companions of the Prophet, without any place of abode, who claimed the promise of the Apostle and implored his protection. Thus the perch of the Prophet's mosque became their mansion and they came to be known as *Ashāb-us-Suffah* or 'the

'sitters on the bench'. They devoted themselves whole-heartedly to learning all about religion from the Prophet.

Sunnah—*Lit.* saying or a custom. The *Sunnah* represents an authentic saying, act or tacit approval of the Prophet to any act.

Sūrah—A term used exclusively for the chapters of the Qur'ān of which there are one hundred and fourteen in number.

Tabiyʿeen—*Pl. Tābʿi.* Those who conversed with the companions of the Prophet.

Taklif-i-Sharʿee—The responsibility devolving on a person under the Islamic Law. One should be adult, sane, in good health and, in certain cases, such as *zakāt* and *haj*, possessed of requisite funds, for being liable to perform a religious duty incumbent on a Muslim.

Tahajjud—A voluntary prayer offered after midnight.

Tayammum—The ceremony of ablution performed with sand when water is not available or cannot be used on grounds of ill-health.

Vishnū—The Preserver, the second god of the Hindu Triad.

Al-Wadūd—*see* Allāh

Zakāt—Poor due incumbent upon every adult Muslim possessed in full of a specified amount of property.

Zuhr—The obligatory after-noon prayer.

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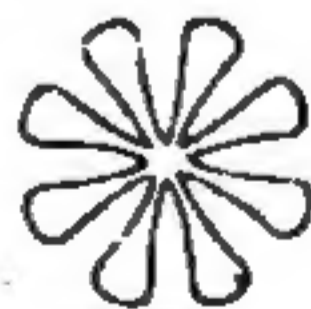
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THE IDEAL PROPHET

(English Translation of Khutabat-I-Madras)

By

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